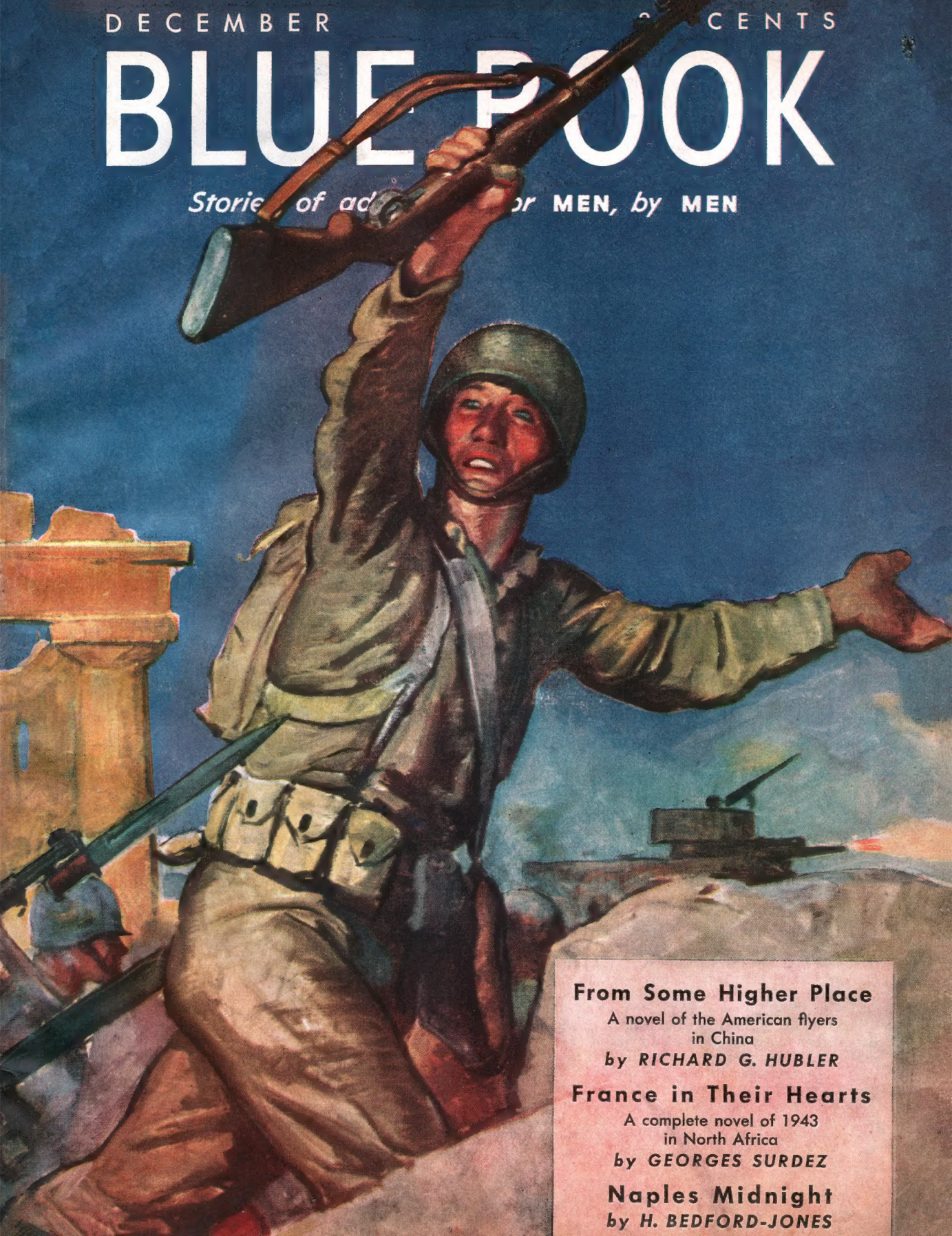


DECEMBER

2 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



From Some Higher Place

A novel of the American flyers
in China

by **RICHARD G. HUBLER**

France in Their Hearts

A complete novel of 1943
in North Africa

by **GEORGES SURDEZ**

Naples Midnight

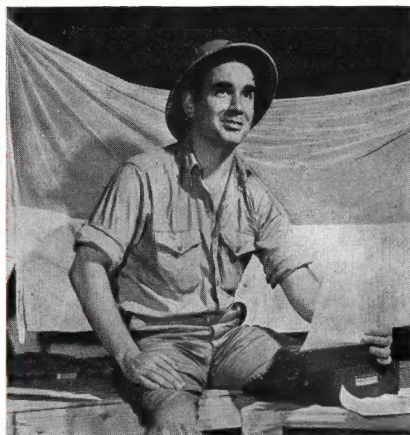
by **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

Who's Who In this Issue

Richard Gibson Hubler

BORN in 1912—remotely a descendant of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Graduated from Swarthmore College in 1934. Joined the Army Corps; washed out; went to *Newsweek* and stayed there off and on from 1935 to 1939—during which time was assistant foreign editor, radio, education, religion editor *et al.* Took a six months' tour around Europe, spending much of it in Russia and Finland; went to PM in 1940 (left 1941) on city staff. A year in Hollywood, writing books ("I Flew For China"—Doubleday Doran, ghosted) and writing around the movie industry. Joined the Marine Corps and have been somewhere in the Southwest Pacific for the last six months. Have written for the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harpers*, *Reader's Digest*, etc.

Wrote the biography of Lou Gehrig (1941—Houghton Mifflin). Took a six-months' cruise in a thirty-eight-foot ketch around the Caribbean in 1940.



Manuel Komroff

HE was born in New York City and studied engineering for a while at Yale but left before graduating, to write music scores for the old Kalem pictures. When the Russian Revolution broke out in 1917, he went as correspondent. He left Russia for Japan via Siberia. After wandering several months about the islands of the Japanese archipelago, he went on to Shanghai and got a job on *The China Press* before finally returning to America.

After several miscellaneous writing jobs around New York, he joined the staff of Boni and Liveright, as the editor of *The Modern Library Series*. His edition of *The Travels of Marco Polo* was published in 1926 and he went to Rome that same year to spend many months in the library at the Vatican, preparing a second book on Marco Polo.

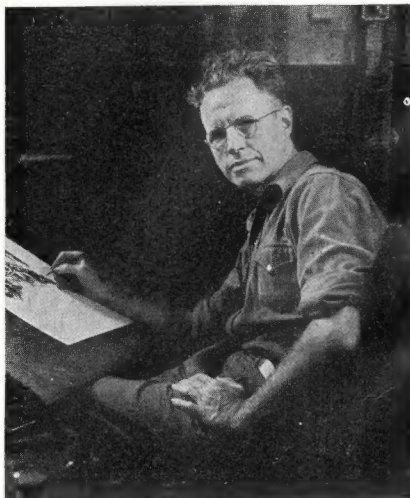
His first novel, *Juggler's Kiss*, brought him high critical praise among discriminating readers and since then other novels have won acclaim, and he has appeared in the O'Brien collection of Best Short Stories.



Cleveland Woodward

BORN June 25, 1900, at Glendale, Ohio; son of Dr. Henry L. Woodward and Eloise Chocland. Went to school at the University School, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Kent School, Kent, Connecticut. Served in the U. S. Marine Corps in World War I. At the close of the war entered Wisconsin University, studying agriculture. Was married that year to Emily Crosby of Osterville, Cape Cod, Mass. Bought a 146-acre farm in Kentucky, and went to work. This was 1920. In 1923 I put tenants on my farm while I got my art education.

Entered the Cincinnati Art Academy that summer. Worked there both in the day classes and also the night school until 1925, when I got my first illustrations to do. Sold my farm that year. Worked hard, and in 1928 my wife, two children and I went to England and from there to Rome, Italy, where I studied in the British Academy for nine months. Reopened my studio in Cincinnati in 1929. In 1934 moved to Philadelphia, where I stayed one year. In 1935 I bought an old Cape Cod cottage and seven acres of land in Truro. Remodeled the house and built a studio. We have three children now. Our boy is in the Marine Corps; our daughter in training to be a nurse; the youngest boy is here with us.



READERS' COMMENT*

OR ELSE

Darn you and your cockeye Crossword Puzzles. I thought I was good, but I find out I don't know the first thing about Crossword Puzzles.

Another gripe: The BLUE BOOK by Men for Men. Bah! Every month I have waited my turn till the women in my family read their stories. And don't call me henpecked either!

Well, better late than never. I am glad to get it any time. Just so the stories and articles and Crossword Puzzles are O.K. I like everything about the BLUE BOOK. Keep up the good work.

Harry Endres, Gloucester, N. J.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, Circulation, Etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933,

of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE published monthly at Dayton, Ohio, for October 1, 1943.
I, before me, a Notary in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared John D. Hartman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Treasurer of McCall Corporation, Publisher of The Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, as embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:
Publisher: McCall Corporation, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Editor: Donald Kennicott, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor: None; Business Managers: None.

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

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John D. Hartman, Treasurer.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 8th day of September, 1943. Victor J. Lore, Notary Public, Kings County, Kings County Clerk's No. 122, Reg. No. 4123. Certificates filed in N. Y. Co. Clks. No. 232. Reg. No. 41128. Commission expires March 30, 1944.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned; and all will become property of McCall Corporation. Address: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

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December, 1943

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Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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He who is discoursing about men should look at earthly things as if he viewed them from some higher place; should look at them in their assemblies, armies, agricultural labors, marriages, treaties, births, deaths,

noise of the courts of justice, desert places, various nations of barbarians, lamentations, markets, a mixture of all things and an orderly combination of contraries.

—Plato



FOREWORD

THESE characters do not, to my knowledge, resemble any persons living or dead. But they are real—as real in substance as any of the phantoms with umbrellas under their arms that are passed every day in the street.

In certain fact, they are much more real than the ordinary passers-by. They have a partial existence, an immortality, in the heart of every man who ever defied his landbound destiny.

And as a pile of stones may be either a pile of stones or a cathedral—depending upon the pattern in which it is arranged—so these men and the men they knew may be. The subtleties of mind that fashion, but exist outside of reality must be their lively sepulcher.

The metamorphosis of the landscapes of the spirit, erased and reformed by the style of time, is the selected problem of art. Blurred and significant, in the manner of the old chalk-talk artist who used a twitch of thumb and the sweep of a palm to change a picture, that shift in horizons is the worm that eats the writer. To pin a moment to paper: to give an

instant its own preservative. That is a problem as tenuous as the wind.

This is a contribution to that effort. Not only a set of portraits and an attempted understanding, but also, perhaps, an interpretation of the thousands who flew like these, of the hundreds who endured like them, of the scores who felt the same inchoate longings and the single ones who dared to seek them out.

These men and their acts are a part of the history of the Second World War. They came from diverse surroundings. They went into an unknown void, to fill it with their bodies and skill and, it may be, with their own peculiar ideals. But to tell their story is not the object.

Nothing will change faster than the essentials of that story. But nothing will last as long as the significant spirit of the characters: the questing, crying soul that could never weep because there was so much work, never remem-

ber because there was so much unknown, never relent because the face of disaster was always before.

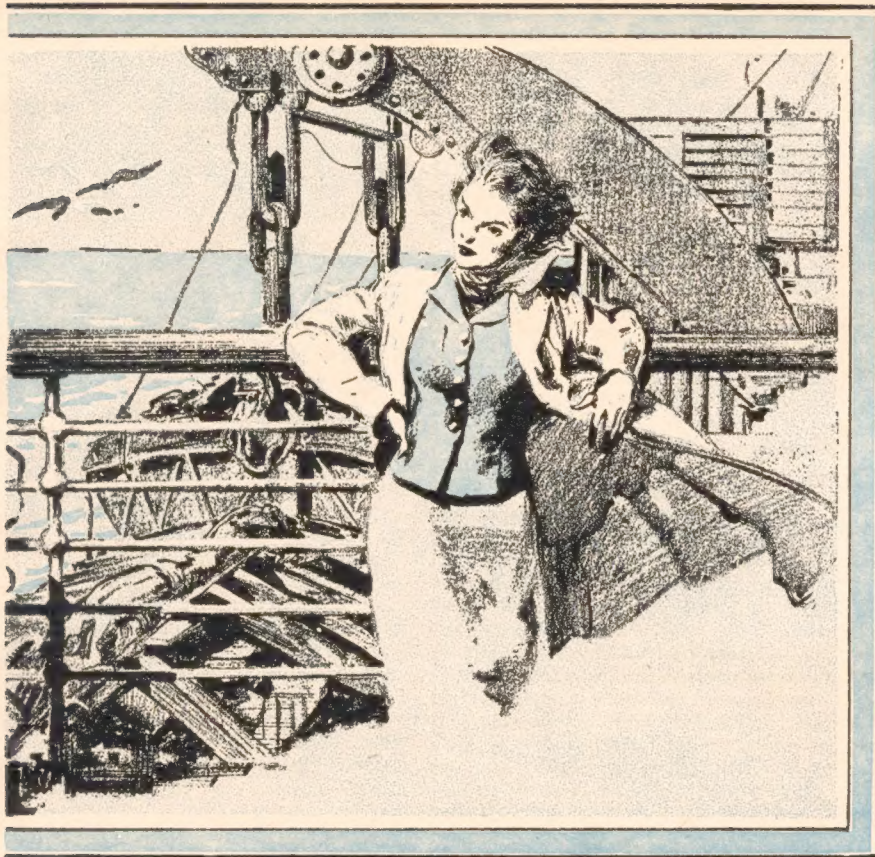
If this remains, it is enough.

—Richard G. Hubler.

BACK of the Grand Hotel at Charlotte Amalie in the Virgin Islands, there is a small bar. It stays open until two in the morning. That is all it is good for, that and rum cokes. All the other bars—the respectable bars—close at midnight.

I spent most of my leave while I was in St. Thomas at the bar of Augustus.

The décor here was robust: the yellow plaster walls, the red-and-white tablecloths and curtains, and the broken window in the front. It was at a table by the broken window, where there was always a breeze on the hot nights, that the question before the house came up.



Shandy missed Bannister. She missed him so much that she came to me to find out what had happened to him.



*by Richard
G. Hubler*

HIGHER PLACE

It was a simple question. It went like this: Should I quit the United States Marine Corps and take a job that would get me six hundred dollars a month and bonuses, or should I not?

It came up after nine rounds of rum-and-coke. They cost four cents apiece. The rum was bad but the coke was always the same. They helped kill the taste, each of the other, and the result was satisfactory and cooling but not intoxicating.

After the question had been put, I said the first thing out loud. "Funny," I said. "This is 1941. Turn it around: 1914. A funny thing." Those days I used to like anagrams and crossword puzzles, including the English ones with their classic references and pontifical puns.

"A cycle, Mist' Feeney, sir," Augustus told me. He was an intelligent West Indian boy. He talked a cross between stage Scotch dialect, Oxford

English, and low Alabama. "Roun' and roun' the li'l' war goes. Where we comes out, nobody knows."

"What am I going to do?" I said.

IT struck me as a reasonable proposition. I had to decide, because the question was before the house. But I couldn't decide on a dry stomach. "Three more of the same," I said in a loud voice. I could afford to throw my twelve-centses around. I was a lieutenant.

I got my drink. "Let's be sensible," I said. "Let's look at it from all angles."

"All right," said Augustus. He was an accommodating boy.

"Past, present, future," I continued.

"What's in my past?"

"How far back?" Augustus wanted to know.

"From where I enlisted until now," I said. "Just that. That's enough of the past."

I thought it over for a minute and finished my drinks. What was in my past. I spoke up. "Nothing," I said. I was as solemn as a stuffed owl.

I had enlisted in June, 1939, at Long Beach, California, in the United States Marine Corps. After thirty days as a recruit, I got an appointment as a Marine flying cadet. I was sent to Pensacola, Florida, to learn how to fly. I stayed there from August, 1939, until May, 1940. Finally I got assigned to a Fighting Squadron.

For the next eight months I toured the Caribbean. I was based at Guantánamo, Cuba, on the United States Naval Reservation there. For the next four months, I went on maneuvers with the Navy all through the West Indies—including Haiti, Puerto Rico and St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. I got a month's leave and came back to St. Thomas and Charlotte Amalie.

This reminded me of the question before the house. I knew what to do.

"Quit," I said. Augustus then came around the bar and clanked his tumbler ceremoniously against mine.

I had heard about it the way Moses did on Sinai: from Above. Major Ralph Michaels, the C.O., a short, red-faced man with clipped gray hair, had put out the good word. He said any officer under him who wanted to resign his commission and take the job could do it with his blessing. Some other Headquarters men weren't so conservative. They intimated that the blessing of the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of War, and possibly the blessing of the President himself, went along with the benison of the Major.

Back at Quantico, Virginia, I went to see him. He asked me to come in. He wanted to talk to me. I snapped to in front of his desk, and he stood up like a gamecock.

"By God!" he said. He snapped his mouth shut and breathed loudly in his nose. "By God!" he said again. "I envy you! I envy you, God bless you! I wish I could go!"

He stamped around his desk and shook hands with me. He stamped back again and accepted my resignation in form. When I was ready to go, he handed me a card.

"Get your transportation money from the paymaster," he said. "Go to this address in New York."

Outside the door, I looked at the card. I was supposed to report, in civilian dress, at the Master Aircraft Manufacturing Company. I was to ask for Mr. J. B. Shayne.

It was mid-June in Rockefeller Center, as good a June as in the country with the red roses planted around the fountains. I had lunch in the sunken plaza with the potted trees around me and the spray from the fountains in my face. The Master Aircraft Manufacturing Company was in the R.K.O. building. So was Mr. Shayne.

I looked at an outside clock. It said five minutes after two. I checked it by my wrist-watch and decided the wind velocity, which was high, had pushed the hands five minutes ahead. It was two o'clock, and I took the elevator for the twenty-fifth floor. Mr. Shayne, whoever he was, had had plenty of time for his lunch.

The office was small. There was one stenographer in the place, a big, bony woman with spectacles and gray hair. Her lips were tight enough to keep a secret. She was rattling away absorbedly on an old typewriter in the corner.

In another corner, reading a novel with a green-and-black paper cover, was a white-haired man with one foot on the desk.

"Yes?" he said. His voice was low.

"Mr. Shayne?" I asked. The man nodded. His face was lean and tanned, and his eyes were steady.

"I was told to report to you," I told him. "Major Ralph Michaels," I added.

The man nodded. He took down his foot and picked up a list in front of him. "Feeney," he read. "Quantico, Virginia. Second Lieutenant, U.S.M.C. That right?"

"Formerly, sir," I said.

"I'm Shayne," said the man. He got up and hobbled around the desk. He pointed at his right foot and made a face. "Shrapnel," he told me. "Last war. Bad on rainy days. Sometimes on sunny days. Give me a contract, Miss Johnson."

Miss Johnson opened a drawer and took out a double sheet of paper. She unlocked the drawer before she took the paper out, and she locked it up after it was closed. Shayne sat down and tapped the contract on the desk. He looked at me as if he were trying to core me like an apple.

"Still want to fight?" he asked. "Still want to go to China?"

I nodded like a puppet on a string. Shayne smiled. He pushed the contract toward me. "There it is," he said. "Look it over."

The contract was printed on one side and folded over. It was long and in fine type but in plain English.

It started by saying that the Master Aircraft Manufacturing Company was organized under the provisions of an act of Congress known as the China Trade Act of 1922. It went on to say it wanted me to work for an aircraft "manufacturing, operating and repair business in China." The typed-in pay was six hundred dollars a month. There was no mention of a bonus.

The contract was drawn to run a full year. It began July 18, 1941. It had seven clauses. Under these clauses, I got steamship fare and rail fare to the "designated place" in China. A blank was left for the designated place. I also got a hundred dollars pocket money and all contingent costs. Five hundred dollars was provided as return transportation money at the expiration of the agreement. Leave, with pay, was granted for one month. So was sick leave. Six months' salary was guaranteed in case of disability or death.

Two things were out of line in a business contract. The first was the clause naming the reasons why I could be fired. They were six: insubordination, revealing confidential information, habitual use of drugs, excessive use of alcoholic liquors, illness not incurred in line of duty, and malingering. The second curious feature was obvious. It made no mention of the kind of work I was to do in China. But I knew that already.

"All right?" said Shayne when I had finished reading. "All right," I said. Shayne smiled again and held out a fountain pen. "Right on the bottom line," he said. "I don't promise a thing, but you'll get better than your bargain."

He didn't give me a copy for myself—nothing except a list of instructions. I walked out and closed behind me the door that had no name on it. I never saw Shayne again.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ship sailed on July 26, 1941, a little Dutch boat named the *Zuyder Zee*. It was a seven-thousand-ton tramp steamer that could make thirteen knots and generally cruised at eleven. It was to sail from San Francisco, California.

I had a farewell drink to the United States in the cocktail lounge of the St. Francis Hotel. Sitting in the middle of the chatter and the shiny black marble and chrome fittings, I remembered Augustus. It must have been the shiny black marble. I ordered rum-and-coke.

I took out my new passport with the gilt eagle on the front and looked at it. I looked longest at *OCCUPATION*. It said: "*Bookkeeper*." It was as good a gag as any.

I checked my wrist-watch. It was a little after ten o'clock. The *Zuyder Zee* would sail at eleven. I paid up and got a taxi. It took me to the pier, and I got aboard. My baggage was already on; and the stateroom, not more than a cat-swing across, looked all right. All I had to do was lean on the rail and see who was coming along.

Nobody would come to see me off. California was my home State, but my family wasn't around. The only one alive was my sister, and she was expecting a baby in New Jersey.

The late arrivals were coming along the gangplank. There was a Chinese couple, smiling and nodding their heads, with a porter in front of them. Their luggage was new and expensive; they looked rather like honeymoon material.

A little later a man in a dark-green trench-coat came up the 'plank. He kept his head down and dug his toes into the wooden cleats as if he were in a hurry. One or two others came out of the black hole in the side of the pier warehouse like people escaping. None of them looked very happy.

It was ten minutes before sailing time when the girl came. I was staring at the side of the corrugated iron warehouse and wondering how many m.p.h.'s of wind it would take to blow it over, when I heard her footsteps. They were like a dance coming up

and toward me, first a tap and then a click, *tap and click, tap-click*.

She had long beautiful legs, but she was not tall. Her hair was brown. It fell to her shoulders and lay shining and alive in the light of the single blazing bulb at the side of the warehouse. She wore a short white coat and a red scarf tucked in. Her skirt was some dark material.

At the middle of the 'plank, she looked up. She looked past me into the shadows of the deck. Her rhythm missed a beat, and she looked down again at the cleats.

Her face stood out in that instant, high and deep in chiaroscuro with the lower planes flat, dark and mysterious, and the high ones sharp and bright. It was not a pretty face in that light. It looked like a mask. There was a big mouth and full lips. The nose was pug and ridiculous.

But her eyes were big and luminous. And there was always the shining, restless hair.

She came to the top of the gang-plank and turned right. I saw her vanish aft.

The fat little Dutch Captain in his white uniform that rustled with starch gargled an order. The *Zuyder Zee's* whistle gave a bass blast. The gang-plank upended and began to come in. The engines shuddered inside the ship.

I decided to go to bed. But I set myself to wake up for breakfast. The girl might be there. Eleven thousand miles was a long way to go without company.

I dreamed of her once: those long legs and the strange face of shadows. I went to breakfast early, but of course, she wasn't there.

LIFEBOAT drill was at ten. Lined up with the rest, I lit a cigarette, and the Captain told me to put it out. I stopped him after the drill and asked him if we were going to hit Honolulu. His black eyes in his fat red face stared back at me.

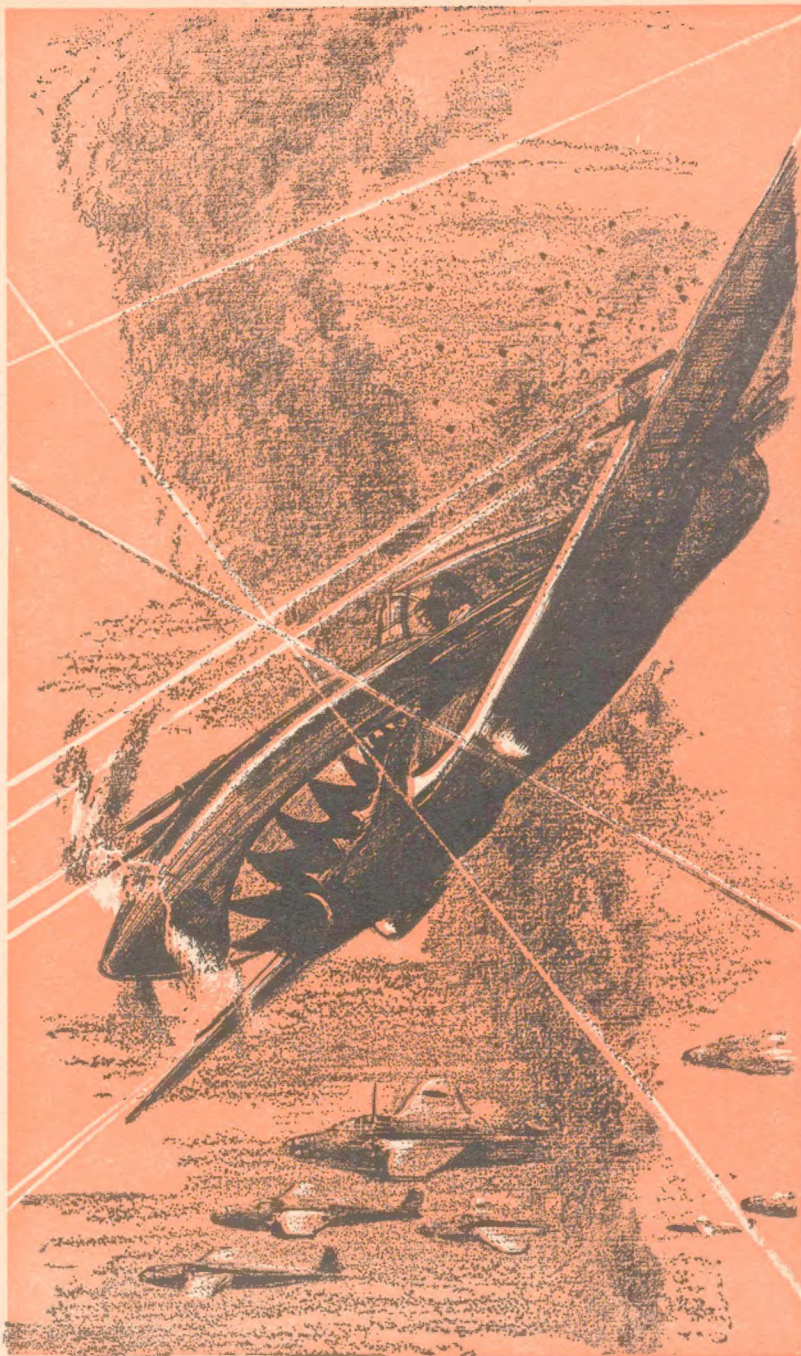
"I do not ask you where you are going, Mr. Feeney," he said. He was still angry about the drill.

The purser, who was no bigger but a good deal thinner than the Captain, stepped up after the skipper had gone. "Don't take offense, Mr. Feeney," he said. "The Captain has a great deal on his mind. You are one of his responsibilities, you know."

He spoke excellent English, and behind him was a brown, underslung little dachshund. The purser saw me look at the dog and smiled apologetically.

"It will do no good to talk to him," he said. "He understands only Dutch."

"It's almost a forgotten language, isn't it?" I asked.



The purser stiffened as if I had struck him in the face. The muscles bulged in his cheeks.

"I lived in Rotterdam," he said. I said nothing. The purser relaxed. "You cannot know what that means," he said. "My home was in one of the blocks that the Nazis leveled to the ground—flat to the ground, Mr. Feeney." He smiled, but it was an effort. "I cannot hold malice or revenge," he told me. "That is nothing to build a

new world on. But I have one wish. I want to live to see the day when twenty thousand Germans will be rebuilding my Rotterdam."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't mean to say exactly what I did."

The purser shook his head. "Why should you be sorry?" he said earnestly. "You are going to do much more than I ever could. In any part of the world, any man who fights the great enemy is my comrade."

He gave me a half salute and walked away with the dachshund behind him. I went to the rail and looked out at the Pacific and its swells of blue oil and melting sun. It was an unusually calm day. The heat beat upward from the water and lay in levels over the ship. The wind moved with the ship, and the passing of the water along the sides hissed in a flatting monotone.

Standing at the rail amidships, I could see end to end of the *Zuyder Zee*. It was not a big boat; it was built squat and sturdy. This trip it looked overloaded. Evidently the cargo hatches were crammed. Lashed on deck were dismembered Lockheeds, troop transports labeled for Batavia. All around them were autos painted a dull gray, and piles of tires and spare parts.

"Fine day," said a voice behind me. I turned around. It was the Chinese couple. "Very fine," I said. I offered a cigarette but he declined it. So did his wife. We leaned on the rail, and their clothes smelled new.

"It is not good form to put this question on this ship," said the Chinese hesitantly. He smiled, asking indulgence. "But we are curious, my wife and I, to know if you are going to China."

"I'm afraid I can't say," I told him. He bobbed his head in instant comprehension.

"We are going to Chungking," he said. "I have been offered a position in the Central Government. I am very happy to take it."

"That's the capital, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you'll have trouble getting there. I understand it's been heavily bombed."

"Yes. But we will have no trouble."

I looked at him. He was a dude, but he did not know it, in his light tan suit, his black hair slicked down with grease and his white shoes. Yet he seemed perfectly willing to go into a place that I knew by all accounts was hell on a river between two cliffs.

"My name is Arch Feeney," I said.

He held out his hand, thin and yellow. I took it. "I am Sung and this is Mei," he said, indicating his wife. He took her hand, and they started to walk toward the bow. He looked over his shoulder. "We will see you again," he said, and nodded.

I thought it was likely. There weren't many places on a seven-thousand-ton boat where one could hide for a month and a half even if one wanted to.

The back of my mind felt uncomfortable. I felt there was something I had wanted to do and had left undone. Suddenly I knew what it was: I wanted to meet the girl I had seen the night before.

I started aft. I hadn't seen her at breakfast, and I was sure she hadn't showed for lifeboat drill. She must be still in her cabin.

I turned a corner and stumbled over her. I nearly fell, but I caught myself with a quick hop. She was tying her shoelace, and she looked up at me through her brown hair with anything but pleasure.

"Hold out your hand and slow down next time, will you?" she said. She was angry.

"Okay," I said. I was surprised enough so that I didn't have any other answer. She got up and marched around the corner. I watched her. Halfway down the deck, she met another man. He looked like the man in the trench-coat who had come aboard late the night before. She hooked her arm into his, and they started to stroll.

I went downstairs to do a little studying. My navigation could stand polishing.

THE *Zuyder Zee* was sliding past the red volcanic kepi of Diamond Head in the morning sun six days later, making ready to swing into the harbor, when I met the girl. I had learned her name from the purser: Vi Shandy. It was easy to remember, because there was a good tobacco named Shandygaff, and, I think, a character in a book too.

In those six days I never had a chance to talk to her. The best I could do was hello at the breakfast-table and around the decks. The man in the trench-coat—his name was Charles Bannister—was always with her. They seemed to have a lot of fun, and I got as keen as I was ever likely to get on navigation theory. I talked to the Chinese couple a few times, but they were absorbed mostly in themselves.

Everyone else got up early to see us come into Honolulu. I came on deck late and still sleepy. The wind hit my ears and they felt cold from the water in them. I yawned, and the girl turned around. "Sleepy-time down your way, Mr. Feeney?" she asked.

I hadn't noticed her. She was wearing the same white coat again but without the scarf. She was standing at the rail with Bannister.

"That's right," I said.

"You know Charley Bannister, don't you?" she asked me.

"Sure," said Bannister easily before I could open my mouth. "The purser introduced us." So he had, but I had forgotten.

"I've been meaning to ask you," said Shandy: "What are you doing on this trip? Everybody except me seems to have a purpose. Charley is going to go to China and fly."

"Now, Vi!" said Bannister. He seemed like a nice fellow.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," she said. She tossed her hair in the sun. "He's going to be in the Chinese air force, a new organization of volunteers. The First American Recruit Group."

"Congratulations, Bannister," I said.

"What are you going out East for?" Shandy persisted.

"What are you going for?" I asked.

She tossed her mane of hair again. "I'm a dancer," she said. "I've got a job in a night-club in Rangoon."



The *Zuyder Zee* was making its turn for the harbor. I checked my watch. It was eight-thirty. "What are you doing out here all alone?" said Shandy again. "Handsome, Irish and mysterious, there must be some reason. Or is it a secret?"

"It's a secret," I said.

That put a damper on the conversation. There was an awkward cough from Bannister, who seemed very polite. Shandy got red to the roots of her hair, and her eyes filled with tears of rage. I stepped back. I had seen women like her before. They always started hitting people when they got that mad. The Chinese couple saved the day.

"Pardon," said Sung, padding up beside me. "This is a lovely morning." Mei, on his arm, smiled and nodded.

"Yes," I said. Bannister was pulled away by Shandy, and I watched her go off down the deck with him.

"Very pretty girl," said Sung thoughtfully. Mei laughed, a light sound like wind in a Chinese chime of glass. Sung smiled at me and I smiled back.

"Very pretty," I said. "I've got to get some breakfast before we dock."

The ship got tied up just before noon. I wandered down King Street, trying to imagine what my sister



would like as a souvenir, but I finally gave it up. By the time I was done with thinking, it was time for a swim. I caught a car for Waikiki Beach and had a long soak in the waves outside the breakers, floating on my back and wondering what Shandy could see in a man like Bannister.

When I got dried and dressed, it was dark. I went back to King Street and picked out a bar down a side-street with a red neon sign in front of

it: *Harry's Hangout*. I had forgotten who told me about it back in Quantico, but they had said there was good cheap food there in the back room.

I ordered antipasto and spaghetti with mushroom sauce, and a bottle of Chianti. I was halfway through the spaghetti, at the place where the short ends of the stuff are hard to keep on the fork, when a heavy-set, dark little man sat down opposite me.

"Mind if I sit here?" he said. His voice was hoarse. "No," I said. He was sitting before I said it. He ordered a whisky sour. When the waiter had gone, he leaned over.

"You're off the *Zwyder Zee*, aint you?" he asked.

"That's right," I said. The spaghetti suddenly felt heavy in my stomach. It wasn't digesting, and this man was the reason. I put down my napkin. "Why?" I asked him.

The waiter brought the whisky sour, and the man drank half of it at a gulp.

"I know," he said. "You think I'm spyin' on you." He wiped his mouth. "Well, I am." He chuckled. "Arch Feeney, fresh from the Marine Corps."

He leaned over the table. "Where you goin', Arch?" he said.

"Do I have to tell you that?" I asked him.

"It would be nice if you did," he said.

I called the waiter and paid my bill. "I don't tell that even to my best friends," I said. "And I don't know

He doubled up like a hinge and fell face downward. I heard the sound of a police whistle and started to run.

you, friend." The lump in my stomach was heavier.

"Aint that too bad?" said the man. He sat still, watching me get up. I

walked to the door and went out. As soon as I got from under the red neon, I started to walk fast, as fast as I could without running.

I was halfway down the block, between two street-lamps, when he caught up to me. He took me by the arm and pulled me to a stop. He was stronger than he looked.

"We could be good friends," he said. He smelled of stale beer, and one hand was cocked in his hip pocket.

"Thanks," I said. I was watching that hand. "No."

It came out in a sweeping swing. I didn't wait to see the leather sap. I ducked under his arm and hit as hard as I could for his face. I missed, but my fist sank into his throat as if it were butter. His arm dropped, and he started to retch. He made another feeble swing at me but missed. I kicked him as hard as I could in the stomach. He doubled up like a hinge. He fell face downward on the sidewalk, his head hitting first.

I heard the sound of a police whistle behind me, and I started to run. By the time I had covered two blocks at a sprint, I couldn't hear it, so I slowed down to a walk. Another block, and I turned into a big bar with plenty of lights and customers.

I was drinking my second beer and taking it slowly at the bar when another man elbowed his way in beside me. "Scotch," he said. "Water and no ice."

He turned to me. "I've been looking for you," he said. "You're Arch Feeney."

He knew I was. He had a Bertillon stare. I let myself look him over before I replied. The details were much better than the last man who had known my name. This fellow was young, with a good tan and a black head of hair. He was dressed in a blue coat and white flannels.

"Why?" I said.

"I'm Farrar," he told me. "With the Department of Justice." He looked around before he said it, then he flipped open a leather case and showed me a gold badge.

"Sit down?" I suggested.

He shook his head. "I'm busier than a chimp on a hot plate," he said. "I just wanted to know if you knew a guy named Charles Bannister."

"Yes," I said. "Slightly. He took a girl away from me on the *Zuyder Zee*."

The F.B.I. man chuckled. "Well," he said, "he won't do it again. He's going back to the States. He talks too much. Just wanted to let you know. I'm the official errand-boy of the Department. It's a warning, too. This is serious business. We know you can keep your lip buttoned, but it won't do any harm for you to know about Bannister."



"The purser?" I inquired.

Farrar's expression became bland and unknowing. "I wouldn't have the slightest idea," he said. He turned to go, then changed his mind.

"By the way," he said, "the police just picked up a bum with his Adam's apple smashed and his stomach kicked in a couple of blocks back. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"Not a thing," I said.

"I didn't think you would," said Farrar reflectively. "So long." He went out and disappeared into the night.

"One more beer," I said.

CHAPTER THREE

SHANDY missed Bannister. She missed him so much that she came to me to find out what had happened to him, the morning after we sailed. She still got mad whenever she looked at me; her eyes were brown with green flecks in them that snapped as she talked.

"I shouldn't even speak to you," she told me.

I shrugged. "Don't, then," I said. I was enjoying myself: on the rail of a tight little, fat little tub, watching the Pacific swish by, feeling the sun warm on my head, with a woman itching to pump me.

Shandy stamped her foot. When she raised her leg to stamp, it showed her petticoat. Or at least I thought it was a petticoat. "Do they still wear petticoats?" I asked.

Shandy, caught off balance, forgot what she was going to say. "It's a slip," she told me.

"Oh," I said politely.

"Where is Charley?" she demanded. She was madder than ever. I won-

dered if she were going to repeat that corny stamping act.

I shook my head. "Don't you know?" she said. I nodded. She stamped her foot again, and I watched with interest. There is a stance in fencing where, if you parry a man's thrusts long enough, he finally leaves himself wide open by recovering a fraction of an inch off-line each time. I hoped it would be that way with Shandy.

Instead, she started to cry. I put my arm across her shoulders, but she shook it off. "N-nobody will tell me," she said in her handkerchief.

"He's all right," I said. "Perfectly all right. He just missed the boat and happened to catch another one bound the other way."

Shandy looked up at me. Her brown eyes were a little bigger than usual. "W-was he a criminal?" she wanted to know.

"No," I said. "Mr. Bannister had a big mouth."

Shandy got red again, but it started to fade when she looked at me. "I liked him all right," I told her. "I have nothing against him."

"Who are you?" she wanted to know.

"You know already," I said. "I'm Arch Feeney, formerly of the United States Marine Corps. Thirty, debonaire and unattached. Could I interest you?"

"No," she said. But she still looked at me. "You didn't have anything to do with whatever happened to him?"

"On my honor," I assured her.

"He's all right?"

"As rain."

She nodded her head as if she was satisfied, and started to walk away. I reached out and got hold of her elbow. Touching her went through me like an electric shock, but I hung on.

"Don't you want to know where I'm going?" I asked.

"You won't tell me," she said.

"That's right. But I don't want to lose the only attraction I have for you—a strong, mysterious man. I can play like I might tell you."

"I wouldn't be interested," she told me. She wasn't being haughty. It sounded as if she just wouldn't. I let loose her elbow, and she went below.

Four nights later, the moon was as fat and yellow as a big field pumpkin. It was behind the *Zuyder Zee* like a prop on a stage set. The wake was spatters of silver. I sat on a bench under the empty isolation hospital in the stern and watched it.

The wake suddenly twisted at a forty-five-degree angle. As if it were a cue, Shandy stepped out from behind the bulkhead. "Hello," I said. She jumped. She turned around so that her back was to the moon and I could see the silhouette of her long

legs through the flimsy stuff of her dress. But I didn't feel pleased; I felt angry. "That's a silly dress to wear," I told her.

"You scared me," she said.

"Glad I did," I said. I flipped my cigarette over the side. "Why do you wear that razzle-dazzle outfit on this boat?" I demanded. "There's no high life on a one-class Dutch tramp."

"I know," she sighed. "But I like to dress up. This is the first time."

"Okay," I said.

"It's none of your business, anyway," she flared.

"Come to think of it, it isn't."

THE ship swerved again, another forty-five-degree change of course. Shandy balanced on her high heels a moment, then toppled toward me. I propped her up. "Thanks," she told me. "Why did they do that?"

"They've been doing it all night," I said. "Every night for the last four. See those lights out there on the horizon?" I pointed to a pair of specks.

"That's another ship," I explained. "Evidently the Captain doesn't want to meet anybody. Haven't you noticed that we're going without running lights in defiance of international law?"

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"He has a double watch on all night."

"Why should we want to dodge other ships?"

"Valuable cargo." I pointed forward to where the Lockheeds and tires were lashed to the deck. "Those things up forward have to get where they're going. In time! A lot of them. Materials like that are precious."

"And men like you?" I discovered she was still leaning against me, and I felt good.

"Pumping, Miss Shandy?" I asked—and she drew away. "I'll get it out of

you," she said fiercely. "You're the only one I can talk to on the ship, and you act like *Fu Manchu*."

"How do Sung and Mei act?" I asked her. "Like Mr. and Mrs. Nick Carter?"

"Let's not discuss personalities." She was at the rail, remote and aloof in her white dress. "All right," I said, stepping to the rail beside her. "Cigarette?" She took one, and I lit it and my own. "What shall we discuss?"

"What do you think of world affairs?"

"In a nutshell, I don't believe in them. They're like fairytales of leprechauns my mother used to tell me. Too fantastic to believe."

"What do you think will happen? On this side of the world, I mean? Or will that be tearing away your veil?"

I smiled at her. "I'll talk right up. I don't think this whole Far East mess will be settled until Japan gets a good licking. I think American air-power could do the trick right now and not take too many losses. I know it sounds like a cold-blooded proposition, but it might be the easiest in the long run."

"Does anybody else think that?"

"I don't know. Maybe they do. But the top won't think so until it's too late, probably. If Japan strikes at Singapore, Siam or the Dutch East Indies, we'll probably pitch in and help. But that, you see, Miss Shandy, will be only after the damage is done, and at the most disadvantageous time from a military viewpoint."

"If it happens that way—then—"

I shrugged. "Long-range bombers might do it."

She turned her face to me. "You seem to be air-minded, Mr. Feeney."

"I ought to be," I told her. "I used to be a second lieutenant in a

U.S.M.C. air squadron. Used to fly for the boys."

She stepped back, her eyes dancing. "You see!" she said triumphantly. "I knew I could get something out of you!"

"Don't go, Miss Shandy," I said. "You could have found that out from anybody, including the Chinese couple."

Her smile froze, then trembled. Without thinking, I stepped to her and put my arms about her. Her body stiffened, and her hand came up too quickly for me to duck. The slap was solid, and my head rang. I let her go. She ran, teetering, around the bulkhead.

"Nice reflexes, Mr. Feeney," I said slowly, out loud. "You can duck a sap, but you're a sucker for a woman."

CHAPTER FOUR

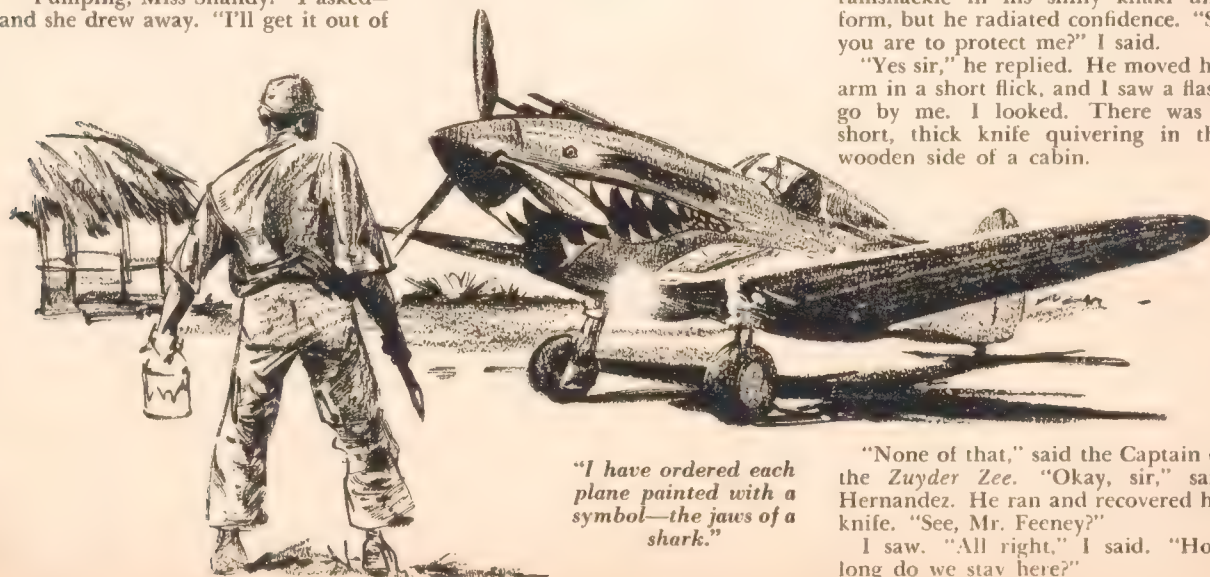
WE put in to Manila on August 10. The first man aboard was a dapper little Filipino. He handed a wire to the Captain, who was by the gangplank and waited at attention. The Captain read it and grunted. He pointed to me.

The Filipino came up to me and saluted. "So happy," he said. He grinned from ear to ear. "I am Lieutenant Hernandez of the police of city of Manila. I am here to protect you. Please, if you are so good, read instructions from employers."

He gave me the wire. It read: REMAIN ABOARD ZUYDER ZEE DURING STOPOVER IN MANILA. THIS IS PART OF YOUR JOB. DO NOT DISREGARD. It was signed, J. B. SHAYNE.

I looked at the Filipino. He was not over five feet two, the average height of a blonde. He was thin and ramshackle in his shiny khaki uniform, but he radiated confidence. "So you are to protect me?" I said.

"Yes sir," he replied. He moved his arm in a short flick, and I saw a flash go by me. I looked. There was a short, thick knife quivering in the wooden side of a cabin.



"I have ordered each plane painted with a symbol—the jaws of a shark."

"None of that," said the Captain of the *Zuyder Zee*. "Okay, sir," said Hernandez. He ran and recovered his knife. "See, Mr. Feeney?"

I saw. "All right," I said. "How long do we stay here?"

"Not long," said the Captain. "Eight hours."

I settled down in the lounge across from the toothy grin of Lieutenant Hernandez, with a bottle of Scotch and a deck of solitaire cards. Shandy went through on her way to the gangplank.

"Staying aboard, Mr. Feeney?" she asked sweetly. I nodded. "So sorry," she said. "I was wishing you would show me the city." I only muttered, and she swept out. This time she had on an off-white linen suit, and she looked as good to me as a cookie-jar does to a kid. This time, though, she was on the top shelf.

"She not like you, no?" asked Lieutenant Hernandez sympathetically.

"No," I said. I played a red queen on a red king. Lieutenant Hernandez clucked as I corrected my error. "Women are like watch," he said sadly. "They always wrong but they not be convinced they anything but right."

I noticed the Chinese couple did not go ashore.

THE *Zuyder Zee* put in at Balikpapan, Borneo, but there was no chance to go ashore. The ship lay off the coast and sent in a boat. All we could do, including Shandy as well as myself, was to lean on the rail and admire the lush green of the shore with the silver towers of an oil refinery rising back of it.

August 24, we came to Soerabaja in Java. As the *Zuyder Zee* chuffed into the harbor, it was zoomed by sea-planes of the Dutch Navy. I could see the sharp colors of the insignie on their sides. I knew there was a large aviation training-school in Soerabaja, with American instructors. I wanted to meet them; I hoped there wasn't a Dutch equivalent of Lieutenant Hernandez to meet the boat.

There was—a dumpy little Dutchman named Hein in civilian clothes; but he had no orders for me to stay aboard. He just offered, as an employee of the Master Aircraft Manufacturing Company, to show me around. I began to wonder at all this solicitude. This was not what I had signed up for. I wondered if the scuffle back in Honolulu, and Farrar, had anything to do with this dry-nursing.

After a while, I didn't mind. Hein, I discovered, was a mine of ready information. There didn't appear to be any secrets, military or otherwise, that he didn't know, and certainly none that he wanted to withhold. We covered the whole of the town, with especial emphasis on the air-field.

It was crammed with Dutch students. A few were part native, but for the most part they could have been transplanted like tulip bulbs to Holland and no one would have noticed

the difference. They loved to stunt and flat-hat, especially since they had no parachutes. Hein told me the 'chutes were still on order in the United States.

"The C.A.A. would go crazy here," I told him.

Hein chuckled. "It would," he said slowly. He knew what I meant. That morning we had seen a plane doing loops and Immelmans at a thousand feet.

"Do you think anything will blow up out here?" I asked Hein.

He shook his head. "Everything depends upon Japan," he said. "Even Japan." He laughed to himself as if it were a kind of secret joke.

"We think a lot of Americans," he said. "Not only as instructors but also as manufacturers. You will not have time to meet the instructors, but you can see the planes." He showed them to me: Ryan trainers for primary work (some on floats for sea-plane primary instruction), Curtiss interceptors for land-based fighters and P.B.Y. patrol bombers for offshore work.

"They're not the latest models," I said.

"No," Hein agreed sadly. "But they were the best you would let us have, and are better than any others."

The two days that the *Zuyder Zee* spent at anchor in Semarang Bay made me restless for the first time. The heat was getting heavier. Shandy refused to talk to me, although I could see the climate was getting on her nerves too. The Chinese couple seemed to be the only ones who took it smiling. Even the Captain and the purser appeared wilted.

"I can tell you now," the purser said one night when we were having a smoke forward. "You have one more port: Singapore. Then you are on your own, free of the ship. We, of course, are free of you too. The responsibility has not been a light one, Mr. Feeney."

"What do you mean?" I asked him. The purser smiled in the gloom and knocked out his pipe. We watched the glowing ashes drop and disappear. "You will find out, Mr. Feeney," the purser said. "Be patient." He waved his hand and started to climb up toward the bridge. Halfway there, he stood aside on the steep ladder.

"Miss Shandy," he said.

I saw Shandy's long legs coming down, and then the edge of the short white coat. She had her red scarf on, and a dark dress. Her head was bare. She looked exactly as she had that night in San Francisco when she came aboard from the pier.

"Good evening," she said. Her voice was low and troubled.

"What's the matter, Shandy?" I asked her. She shook her head. "I

don't know," she confessed. She went on down toward the bow of the *Zuyder Zee*. Her heels tapped on the iron plates. I looked at my watch. Ten o'clock. I decided to go below and swelter in solitude.

I had just put on my pajamas when there was a knock at the door. I hesitated. The cable from Shayne, and my odd friends Hein and Hernandez, all had got on my nerves. I flipped back my pillow and picked up my .45. With the gun gripped in the pocket of my dressing-gown, I opened the door. It was Shandy.

"Are you decent?" she asked.

"Come in," I said. She did so and sat on the day-bed. Her face seemed thinner than it had been when she first came on board. Her eyes looked worried.

"I know what's the matter," she said. She looked at the heavy right pocket of my gown, and I tossed the gun back of me onto my bunk. She gasped.

"A precaution," I explained. "I don't know much about what goes on, but I want to be ready in case." Shandy stared at the gun. I took her by the shoulders. "Well," I said, "what's the matter?"

She looked directly up at me from where she was sitting on the day-bed. "I'm worried," she said. "Worried about Arch Feeney, damn you!" She started to cry. Her face didn't move, but the tears pushed themselves out of her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

If anybody should ask me, and of course no one ever will, what broke Shandy down, I think I could tell them. It was the pile-up of little things: the still weather, the heat, the smells of the ship. They sound queer. They don't sound like the stuff love is made of, or whatever Shandy and I had. But they were the start of it.

EVERYONE was worrying. The Chinese couple worried about me. The Captain worried. Because he, the Old Man, did, the crew did too. One night an engine-room hand, taking a smoke on top the hatch, slid over to me. He touched me on my whites, and I looked at his oil-sooty face. He grinned. His teeth made a splash of white in his face.

"Don't worry, bud," he told me. "We'll get you through." He spoke with a nasal Yankee twang and slid away again. He finished his cigarette and went below. Of course the purser and the skipper always nurse-maided me a little. And the crew had it in their eyes, as dogs might look when they don't know if the master wants to play or be serious.

The mood communicated itself to everybody, and especially to Shandy, who was sensitive enough, God knows.

She had nothing to do but be plucked by every emotion that went through the ship. Plus the sensuous touches: the smells of bilge, and the stiff, small air that went by with the ship's movement in the hot days, the hypnotic drumming of the engines.

I didn't have much to do with it, though I thought so at the time. I mean at that time when Shandy told me she was worried about me.

"Shandy!" I said. I felt horrified. "Stop it!" I fumbled in my bureau drawer and brought out a handful of handkerchiefs. She took them and started to laugh in little gasps.

"Are you going to subsidize a laundry?" she said jerkily.

I smiled and shook my head.

Shandy dried her eyes. "What are you going to do, Arch?" she asked me. "I know it's none of my business, but there's a queer air about this boat. And about you. I'm not trying to pump you, honestly. I just want you to take care of yourself."

I put my arm about her. She came to me like a child wanting comfort. I could smell the fragrance of her hair, a scent like field-flowers. It made me dizzy. I kissed her.

We heard a clatter forward. The anchor was coming up. The engines began their familiar shuddering beat under us. The *Zuyder Zee* was on its way to Singapore. Last stop. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

AT Singapore the United States consul decided that Shandy and I should go separate ways. We never saw him. He sent his assistant, a Mr. Jerome Matthews, born in Boston with excellent manners and a high collar, to tell us the news. Mr. Matthews began by telling us that the usual route to Rangoon was by train to Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, F.M.S., then to Port Swettenham and finally up the Rangoon River forty miles to the city.

"You, Mr. Feeney," said Matthews, "are to proceed to Rangoon with all possible haste. You, Miss Shandy, are to stay in Singapore."

"What do you mean?" I felt rebellious. "We can do—"

"These are orders from the Master Aircraft Manufacturing Company, Mr. Feeney," murmured Matthews. He put a finger delicately inside his collar. "They have been transmitted to us. We are authorized to give them to you, and also to inform you if you are so headstrong as to intimate that you do not intend to follow instructions, your contract is canceled."

"And I'm caught here without money?"

Matthews spread his fingers. "Unless you have other means."



With a swift movement, Ching kicked open the compartment door and flung the old man into the darkness.

I gave up. "What about Miss Shandy?" I inquired.

"Her troubles," Matthews answered suavely, "are of a different sort. There is a clearance to be made on your passport, Miss Shandy, before you will be permitted to go into Burma or the Malay States."

"Isn't this practically in Burma?"

"There is a geographical difference," Matthews said dryly. He got up from the arm of the sun-deck chair on which he was seated. "Before I go," he said,

"I was instructed also to offer you the services of an invaluable Chinese servant." He raised his voice. "Ching!"

I turned my head and saw a tall, shambling Chinese with an apologetic grin come toward us. "Ching," said Matthews. "This is Mr. Feeney. He will be your employer. That is, if you will accept him," added Matthews, turning to me.

"What else can I do?" I growled. "All right, Ching." The lanky Chinese bobbed and smiled his thanks.

"Come on!" said Clair. "Let's see what happened!" The Japs had hit two ships.



Matthews picked up his Panama hat. "Good-by," he said. "Remember, Miss Shandy, at the consulate at nine tomorrow." He bowed and went down the gangplank of the *Zuyder Zee*.

Shandy and I looked at each other. "I get off here," I said. "End of the line," she told me. I shook my head. "I'll be around Rangoon," I said. "I hope I will, anyway."

"Hope!" she said contemptuously. She brightened a little. "We could see this town together for a while," she said. "You've never showed me a town, and we went through a lot of them on the way."

The purser, who was listening in, coughed. It was a discreet clearing of the throat. "I'm afraid there won't be time," he told her. "The train for Kuala Lumpur leaves in a few minutes. There won't be another one for some days."

SHANDY didn't say a word. She turned to me and put up her face. I hugged her and kissed her hard. Her face was wet, but she wasn't really crying. "Good-by," I said, and went down the gangplank without looking back.

The train consisted of five cars and an asthmatic engine, filigreed with rust. It sat champing steam from its cylinders and waiting for us to get aboard. I got the tickets for Ching and myself. By the time we got settled in the compartment, the train was moving. It was beginning to rain.

"Early end of rainy season," said Ching in a high, metallic voice. "I hope." He looked outside with a pleased expression. "Every minute there are eighteen hundred thunderstorms all over the earth. That is one hundred lightning flashes a second, since the storms give off three hundred thousand flashes an hour." He finished speaking in his precise English, and a roll of thunder and a faint blur of lightning added emphasis to his remark. I felt surprised.

"You're an encyclopedia, Ching," I told him.

"Thank you," he said. "I try to please."

I looked around the compartment. Ching and I were alone except for an old Chinese in a ragged costume,

dozing in a far corner. The train was going slowly. Its speed could not have been more than fifteen miles an hour. I didn't know how long it would take to get to Kuala Lumpur, but I decided to sleep it through. I stood up to stretch.

My back was to the old Chinese and Ching. I had my arms above my head, touching the rack, when I heard a muffled scream behind me. I whirled, and my hand went to the .45 I had tucked in the waistband of my trousers. But there was no need. Ching was twisting the arm of the agized old Chinese.

"Let him go, Ching!" I cried. "Let him go!" Ching bobbed his head, but he did not loosen his grip. With a swift movement, he kicked open the compartment door as the train rattled along, and flung the old man out into the rainswept darkness.

"Are you insane, Ching?" I demanded. I was numb with amazement. "What was the matter?"

Ching said nothing.

"A friend that you wanted to help on his way?" I asked sarcastically.

Ching pointed solemnly to the floor. I saw an open clasp-knife gleaming. The worn carpeting had muffled its fall. I stared at it, transfixed.

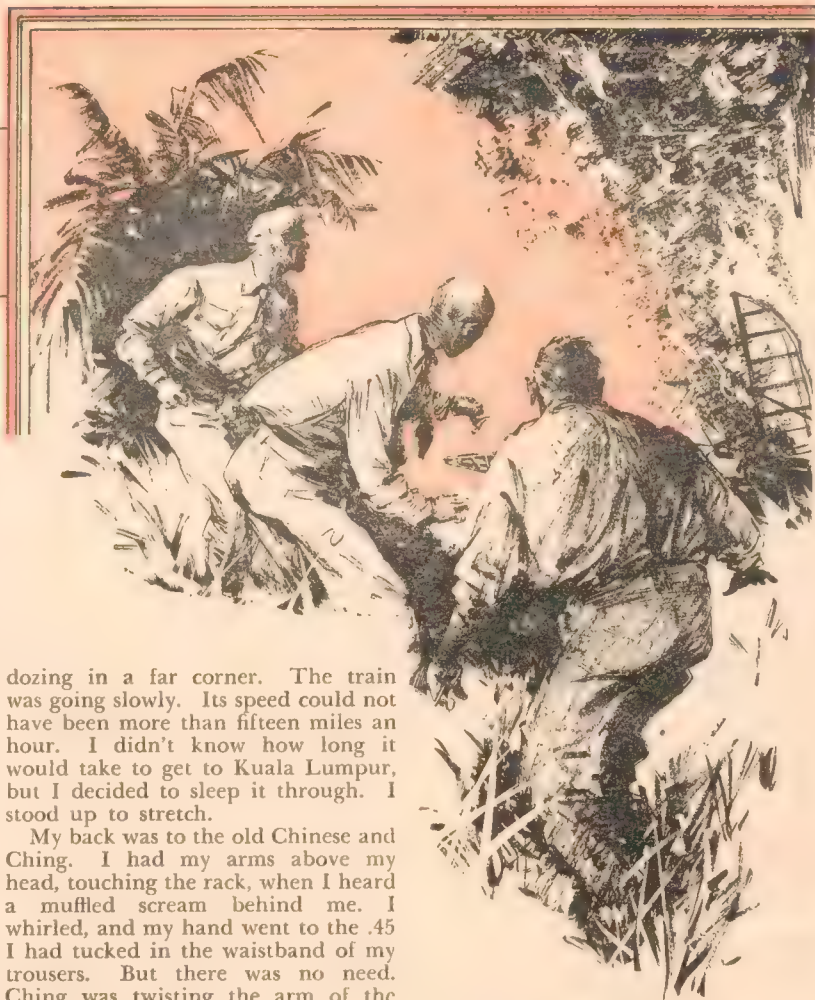
"He tried to stab you," said Ching.

For a moment, I said nothing. I picked up the knife and closed it.

"Thanks," I said then.

We rode the next few miles in silence. The rails clack-clacked wearily under us. The rain drove angrily against the windows.

"What's the play, Ching?" I wanted to know where I stood in all this mystery. I felt myself getting angry again.



"I am ordered to protect you," said Ching calmly. "You are an important man."

"I'm an ex-Marine flyer," I told him. "I took a job flying for China. I come out here expecting a peaceful old age. In Honolulu, a slaphappy bum tries to slug me, and now in Burma an octogenarian tries to stab me. All the way over I either stay on the boat under orders or else have a bodyguard. What's the pitch?"

"I know only my orders," Ching made reply.

I REMEMBERED the Chinese, Sung and Mei. "What about the Chinese honeymooners who were on the boat?" I inquired. I felt instinctively that Ching should know everything. He did.

"They," he said gravely, "are safe." "Didn't you have orders on them too?"

"No. They are well-known."

"They told me they were going to work for the Chinese Government."

Ching looked at me with amused tolerance. "They are very important



members of the Government," he told me. "They will go to Hongkong and fly to Chungking. They are well guarded."

"Who are 'they'?" I demanded.

Ching shook his head gravely. "My orders," he reminded me, "do not include telling you."

Five days later we were at the mouth of the Rangoon River. The next day we arrived in Rangoon. It was a teeming city of tumbledown huts and sooty stone buildings with a huge gilt pagoda glittering in the center. Ching gave me no time for cleaning up or seeing the town. He hustled me onto another ramshackle train. We set off up-country. Our destination was still one hundred and fifty miles to the north. It was a landing-field and base called Timara near the southern terminus of the Burma Road.

The train pulled out of Rangoon at four o'clock in the afternoon. It pulled into the thatched station of Timara at ten that night. The first thing I saw was a row of lanterns: that was the station platform. The first thing I heard was a native gravelly tooting on a battered clarinet. He was playing "*There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight*," Ching said he always met the train.

There was an ancient Chevrolet waiting. Ching piled me and the luggage into it and started off through a sea of sticky brown sludge. He took just under an hour to make the seven miles out to the base.

At last we chugged up to the veranda of what appeared to be a modern clapboard building with a galvanized iron roof. The rain, pelting on the metal, made a deafening din.

Ching hurried me inside. "Let me take off my coat," I said. "It's wet."

He waited until I had shucked off my soaked raincoat and ushered me inside the office. A lighted gasoline lamp hung from the ceiling. Across a battered desk a man was sitting. He was tall and bald. His forehead disappeared over the top of his head. What was left of his hair, the hedge over his ears, was white and crew-clipped. He had gray gimlet eyes and wore a United States Army uniform open at the top of the tunic.

"Major Rees, may I present Mr. Arch Feeney," Ching announced.

"Thank you, Captain Ching," said Rees in a slow voice that still had the remnants of a Southern drawl. "You may go. Keep an eye on the door."

"Yes sir," Ching executed an about-face and went out.

"Can you tell me what this is all about, sir?" I was getting tired of being pushed. I had been bounced around in trains and jalopies long enough. I wanted the lowdown.

REES smiled. It was like cracking a mask. The smile spread across his brown, weatherbeaten face. "Just a minute, Mr. Feeney," he said. "I know how tired you are. I know how irritable you feel. You have every right to ask for an explanation. I'm here to see you get one."

He stopped. He had noticed that the blind was raised at one window. He got up and pulled it down, then returned to his desk.

"The fact is," he continued, "you are the bearer of an important message. One of the most important messages I can imagine. We could not send it by cable or in cipher. We had to trust it to a messenger."

"I'm afraid you've got the wrong man," I told him. "I just came out here to draw my pay and fly."

"And fight?"

"And fight."

"You've already won your first and probably biggest battle, Mr. Feeney. That is, if you are the man I think you are. The message I just referred to was given to two men—yourself and Charles Bannister. I understand Mr. Bannister did not get through."

I smiled in spite of myself. "No," I said. Rees looked at me the same way Shayne had back in New York. "Feeney," he said, "you were selected because you had one invaluable talent. *You see, this message had to be delivered without the carrier knowing he had it.* Mr. Shayne gave it to you. To you, because you are supposed to have an amazingly retentive memory. Tell me, can you remember everything he said to you the afternoon you saw him?"

I thought. "Yes," I said. "I believe I can."

"Tell me."

"Everything?"

"Just what Shayne said."

I focused my memory. "From the beginning to the end," I told Rees, "he said this. Nothing but this." I began talking without inflection.

"Yes. . . . Feeney, Quantico, Virginia, second lieutenant, U.S.M.C. That right? . . . I'm Shayne. . . . Shrapnel, last war. *Bad on rainy days, sometimes on sunny days. Give me a contract, Miss Johnson.*"

"Wait a minute," said Rees. His eyes were shining with excitement. He was scribbling on a pad in front of him. He repeated: "*Last war. . . Bad on rainy days—sometimes on sunny days.*" He looked up. "Go on, Feeney," he said.

"*'Still want to fight, still want to go to China? . . . There it is, look it over. . . . All right. . . . Right on the bottom line. I don't promise a thing, but you'll get a better—'*"

"No, that was '*better than your bargain*,'" I corrected.

Rees took down the last sentence. He was breathing as if he had just finished a race. He threw down his pencil stub. Picking up the pad, he studied it. I waited. His lips moved.

"About the tenth," he said. "The tenth of December." Suddenly he remembered me.

"Sorry," he said. "I forgot you were here. You've done our country a great service, Mr. Feeney. You'll be able to do more. I'll have Captain Ching show you to your bunk. You won't need a bodyguard any more. Be nice to Ching. He's a captain in the Chinese Intelligence."

We were churning through the mud toward a dim light when I stopped Ching. "Captain," I said, "if you remember to do it among other things, I beg you to give me back to the Indians."

"In 1920," Ching said solemnly, "there were 244,437 Indians in the United States."

I felt as if I were going crazy.

CHAPTER SIX

I WOKE up the next morning early. It was dark and cool. The air was damp and the crisp smell of bamboo and reeds was in my nose. I checked my watch. It was a little before five. Breakfast, Ching had told me, would be at six.

My bed was a steel cot with the four legs in little tins of kerosene. This was evidently to discourage any wild life from visiting me. The mattress felt as if it were stuffed with burdock burrs dried in a kiln. Over me, like a cheesecloth coffin, was a cube of mosquito netting. There was a thin Army blanket at the foot of the bed and the sheets were clean. Two other cots, outfitted like mine and with rumpled sheets, were near the opposite wall.

The hut was built, I could see in the gray light, of bamboo stringers and woven palmetto matting for roof and walls. There was no floor except the packed dirt. Ching had said there was a shower and toilet in the back.

I got dressed in the costume that Ching had advised me to put on—half-length boots of black leather, khaki shorts and shirt and a sun helmet. Then I walked out to look for the mess-hall and Major Rees. I wanted something to eat and some questions answered.

I stopped, though, and took a look around. The sun was just coming up. The underbrush, a hundred yards back from my bunkhouse, was beginning to steam faintly. The black loam under my feet was soft and squidgy.

The airfield was directly before me, a paved runway topped with asphalt, running north and south. The rest of it was soft clay. It was in the middle of a valley that was perhaps eight miles across and level as a dance-floor. There were low hills to the west and high, jagged mountains to the east. The Sittang River, I told myself, must be somewhere in that direction. The wind, it appeared, was fairly steady, coming down from the north.

I saw Rees walking toward me. He was solemn but he looked less worried than he had the night before. "Good morning," I said.

"Hello," said Rees. "Sleep all right?"

I ducked my head. "Those mattresses," said Rees mournfully. "I've never had the courage to rip one apart and find out what they stuffed them with."

"Major," I began, "I—"

"You don't need to call me that," he told me. "The Chinese are very punctilious. Actually, I have no more rank than you. I resigned my commission too."

"Major" is as handy as anything," I said. He had put me off the track. I got back as fast as I could.

"Is it permissible to ask some more questions about this affair?" I inquired. "I'm still cloudy."

"Go ahead."

"Can you tell me what the message was?"

"No."

"Can you tell me why Bannister and I got the assignment—and coming by slow tramp steamer—rather than some others who might have flown over?"

"Yes. There were others. They came by Clipper. But they never got here."

I swallowed. "Killed?"

"We don't know. We're still trying to find out. Delayed, perhaps. That would be sufficient in most cases. The Japanese are very adept at that."

"So the message had something to do with the Japs?"

Rees looked sidewise at me with an amused expression.

"Yes, Mr. Feeney."

"Arch."

"Arch."

"Why wasn't the message just given to me?" I continued. "Or why wasn't it sent in cipher?"

"Cipher, or the substitution of a set of symbols for a message, can always be broken. As a matter of fact, the Japanese have much better cipher experts than we do, simply because of their intricate philological background. But code, or the arbitrary substitution of meanings, is almost impossible to break if it is done correctly."

"Why couldn't the message have been given me directly?"

"I am sure that you are exceedingly discreet under ordinary circumstances, Arch. I am not so sure you would be under torture."

"I see," I said.

Rees patted me on the back. "Forget it," he said. "The message came through and in time. You won't be a clay pigeon again. You have other work. You have a rather good reputation as a pilot, Arch. Rather good. There's the mess-hall."

Rees pointed out a low, camouflaged building. Two others, he told me, were operations and a hangar. The doors were open on the hangar but I couldn't see any planes. "Where are the ships?" I asked him. Rees waved

vaguely. "We disperse them around," he said.

We went inside the mess-hall. A man of medium height with a tight, turned-down mouth and a shock of iron-gray hair was waiting for us. He wore a rumpled Army uniform and his eyes were heavy as though he hadn't slept. "This is Colonel Clair," said Rees. "Arch Feeney. He's—"

I heard an offbeat *vroom-vroom* in the air. Rees and Clair flung their heads up at the same moment. "God-dam!" said Clair in a heavy Southern accent. "Nippers!" He started to run for the door, with Rees and me on his heels. Just as he got to the steps, there was a terrific blast. Dirt flew into my face and stung. My ears throbbed from concussion. I saw a gout of red flame a hundred yards away and then a hand grabbed my arm and threw me like a discus.

I landed in a slit-trench on top of Rees. A second later the flying body of Clair landed on both of us. Clair twisted to one side. "Glad to meet you, Feeney," he said calmly. "I understand you were a pilot with the Marines."

I got back my breath. "Yes sir," I said. "Thanks for the toss."

He chuckled. "You don't need the 'sir,'" he told me. He looked at Rees and laughed again. "Rees really likes his title, but I'm just a fugitive from a brass-hat."

"The Colonel always has his little joke, Arch," said Rees, wriggling under me.

I heard a series of explosions, one after the other. The expression on Clair's face changed. He listened grimly. "Hear that, Rees?" he said. "Not satisfied with breaking up my chow, those damned monkeys are dropping bombs in trail."

"They might hit something this time," remarked Rees.

We listened. There were no more explosions. The *vroom-vroom* was fainter.

"Come on!" said Clair. He jumped to the top of the trench. "Let's see what happened!"

The Japs had hit two ships. They were still burning in red flame and orange smoke. One exploded while we watched. "Goddam, goddam!" Clair said over and over. Rees said nothing, but his long face was grim.

THERE was a line of bomb craters across the field. They had straddled but not injured the asphalt landing strip. Beyond the two ships, the raid had not done any damage. Evidently the camouflage on the buildings was effective. I saw groups of other ships, obviously P-40's, scattered in among the underbrush around the field in little hacked-out coverts netted over with painted cloth. Strips of

green paper dangling gave the illusion of leaves waving.

Clair turned to me. "Nothing to do," he said. He was through with his cathartic of cursing. "They get me when they come early in the morning. Low morale." He looked at me curiously. "Have any trouble getting through to here with that message?"

"No," I said. He grinned.

His face became suddenly friendly. "I bet," he said. "I've been talking to Ching."

"Where does he pick up those erratic bits of information?" I asked. "He got hold of a 1930 World Almanac," Clair told me. "It's a hobby, just as collecting Jap rudders is a hobby of the Major's."

"I'd like to get a few hundred more," said Rees. His expression was still grim as he looked back at the smoldering frames of the P-40's.

"Let's eat," said Clair.

After breakfast, I got permission to try out one of the ships. It looked like a clear day. The sun was getting hot and the sky was as bland as milk. Rees assured me that the Japs would not come back. "If they do," he said, "just put your head in a cloud."

I glanced at the cloudless sky. "Okay," I said.

The P-40's, I discovered, were good ships. They handled well, about like the mid-wing F4F-3 Marine fighters. They did not seem too maneuverable, however. I guessed it was due to their weight.

Their top speed went up to 340 miles an hour but that was a strain on the Allison in-line. They came in at about one hundred miles an hour. Rees warned me to keep tail-high. "They have some stalling characteristics," he told me. "Three of them have been put in the shop for scraped wing-tips or landing-gear breaks from ground-loops."

I took one up and put it through some aerobatics, practising lazy eights. It seemed all right. I took a look at the field under me. The only thing noticeable was the black runway.

The only complaints I could make about the P-40's after that first test flight were minor. They could have had more supercharging. The ceiling was only about twenty-seven thousand feet. There was a half-inch of armor on the back of the seat but there might have been some on the sides. They might have been later models and lighter ships (the gross weight was somewhere around 7800 pounds) with more climb.

But I didn't mind. Reliability was the thing I appreciated most. The P-40's had that. I worried about the liquid cooling but Rees told me afterward that very few ships ever got grounded just because a slug happened to go through the radiator.



On the ground, I looked over the armament. There were four .30 caliber guns and two .50 caliber. The tracers, red-smokers, were spotted one to every five. Rees saw me going over the guns and came over.

"They're good," he said, patting the short muzzle of one of the .50's. "They're all you'll need. The Japs like to use a lower caliber gun to spot their aim, then flick on the switch over to cannon—about .22 millimeter, I'd guess. We do it differently—and better."

"Am I the only pilot around?"

Rees smiled. "Colonel Clair and I fly," he said.

"But aren't there any others?"

REES looked at the sky. "Yes," he said. "We haven't been up much, though. The rainy season is just blowing over. Most of the boys are down in Rangoon."

"I know a girl there," I said involuntarily and Rees nodded.

"I know you do," he said.

"We asked the consul to speed you along," he continued. "He evidently thought Miss Shandy was a detriment to your getting up here. So he kept her in Singapore. She should be in Rangoon by now."

"The far-flung tentacles of the U.S.A.," I said. Rees nodded again. "From the rocky shores of Maine to the sun-kissed jungles of Burma," he said soberly. "I imagine it will be even farther soon." He didn't amplify his crypticism and I didn't ask.

There was a lot of shouting when the boys checked in that night at dinner. Most of it had to do with the news that two P-40's had got theirs. The two pilots who had the ships made most of the noise. They were Ned Evarts and Jonny Black. I found out afterward that they were sharing my bunkhouse with me.

There were about fifteen pilots, all told. Most of them were under

twenty-three. I felt like a father. They gathered in the mess-hall, laughing and shouldering each other. I was introduced to most of them.

Finally Clair hammered his glass with a knife, and the hubbub died. Clair stood up.

"We are to get to work in earnest," he said. "Mr. Feeney, our new arrival, brought a vitally important message. I cannot, for the moment, tell you its contents. I can tell you that it means full speed ahead. I have assurance that we will have all the supplies and backing it is possible to send us."

The crowd murmured and moved excitedly. Only a few looked at me. The rest were intent upon Clair.

"We are the First American Recruit Group," Clair went on. "We have a job. That job is to protect the Burma Road. That is all of our job for the present. To do that, we shall proceed exactly as we have done in the past. We shall have the full co-operation of the Chinese Government in every way. Our success, in great measure, will depend upon that co-operation for our listening posts will be manned almost entirely by the Chinese."

His mouth quirked. "You gentlemen have a new title," he said. His accent was more noticeable. "You are now, unofficially, the Flying Sharks. That is what the Chinese have nicknamed you. I trust you will make the name famous."

The pilots began cheering, but Clair held up his hand. "As an opening psychological move," he said, "I have ordered each plane painted with a symbol—the jaws of a shark. The Nippers don't like the shark. I don't think they'll like us, either."

The cheering broke out again, but Clair went on:

"This is my first lecture," he said. "It is the first, I hope, of many. Before you can catch your Jap, you have to learn how. That is why I am here. That is why Major Rees is here. We are supposed to know how. Everything we know, you will learn."

He began to list his points in methodical fashion like a tutor before his pupils.

"Everything I have to say is based primarily upon two axioms: First, know the exact performance of the enemy pilot and plane. Second, invent tactics that will bring him down. And in support of these two, I offer the old Army motto: a poor plan, precisely executed, is infinitely better than a good plan sloppily executed."

"You only need to know one thing about the make-up of your enemy. Give him a good licking, and he won't come back."

Clair paused. The room was so silent that the darkness outside seemed loud with noise. Clair began again;

"In the first World War—" he said. He stopped. His grim lips quirked a little. "I say that because I happen to believe—" He broke off again. "In the World War," he told them, "the original way to fight was the dog-fight: tie onto the other man's tail and try to loop inside him. That won't work today. Too many different kinds of ships in the air, and the United States doesn't have the monopoly on the best by a damn' sight.

"The way to do it is to pair up for heavier fire-power. Practice coming in by pairs, shooting and dropping off, coming in again. *He who shoots and runs away will live to be an ace some day.* Paste that in your hats."

He stopped abruptly. "Next lecture: same time, some other night." At his words, the compact little group began to breathe again. There was no laughter—just the low murmur of talk. Clair went out, and Rees followed him. I was about to get out and go to my bunk when I felt someone tug at my sleeve. I turned. A bright-eyed blond boy was standing there with a nervous smile on his face. He was one of the handsomest men I had ever seen.

"I'm Ned Evarts," he said. He jerked his thumb at a boy next to him, a dark, short little fellow with restless darting eyes and a swarthy complexion. "That's Jonny Black."

"Glad to know you," I said.

"We're your bunkies," said Evarts. "We used to be in the Navy. Hope you don't mind."

"It won't contaminate an ex-Marine to sleep with ex-gobs for a month or two," I grinned. "If it was longer—well, you can't tell."

Evarts giggled. Black glowered. I wondered just how young they were and gave up trying to figure it out. Kids in uniform, I thought. It gave me a sour taste in my mouth, and I started to go out the door.

"Mr. Feeney—" said Evarts' voice.

"What?" I said. I didn't turn, and I suppose my voice sounded harsh. Evarts' tone had a little stiffness in it.

"I have a note for you," he said. "A Miss Shandy gave it to me at the Silver Slipper. She had just arrived there."

I took the slip of paper from his fingers. "Thanks," I said.

"Don't mention it," said Black. It was the first time he had said anything and his tone was sardonic and hostile. He and Evarts went out. I stood under the gasoline lantern and unfolded the paper.

"*I miss you like my right leg,*" Shandy wrote. "*Please to come to Rangoon right quick, sir. I love you.*"

I stared at the tall upstrokes of her handwriting, and the whole tense-ness of the day fell away.



The Jap bomber stumbled in mid-air. I saw flame on the left side. Then, like a lead lump, it dropped.

I heard a shout. I looked up, and Clair was at the door. He stared at me. "Get to bed, Feeney," he snapped. "You'll need your sleep."

"Am I permitted to ask why?" I was already moving toward the door. Clair nodded brusquely. "Ching's got hold of some Intelligence dope," he said. "The Nippers are planning an all-out raid on the Burma Road tomorrow. Time unspecified. Get to bed."

I tucked Shandy's note into my shirt-pocket and trudged off through the night. Evarts and Black were already sound asleep.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE clanging woke me. In my dreams I thought I was back in the hometown of Petersburg. I had been raised there before the family migrated to California. I still remembered those Pennsylvania days in my sleep. I couldn't remember them

any other way, though. When I heard the clanging, I was watching the blacksmith in my dreams.

Somebody shook me. It was Evarts, his mussed hair like a halo in the dawn. "Get up!" he said. "That's the alarm!" I knew it was: Rees had told me that they banged on an old engine part as a warning. I could hear the chutter of the planes warming up outside.

Evarts was already dressed. Across the room, Black was pulling on his boots. I slid under the mosquito netting and started to dress. Carrying my shirt, I went back toward the toilet.

"Wait a minute," said Evarts.

"What's the matter?" I asked him.

"This is a raid!" said Evarts.

I shook my head. "If they get me, they get me," I said. "It may be vulgar to point out, but if a burst bomb doesn't do it, a burst bladder might." I heard a laugh. I thought it came from Black but I couldn't make sure.



I got on the field a minute after Evarts and Black, just as Clair came striding toward the dozen planes that were lined up in the growing light. He saw me and winked. I nodded. He pointed to a P-40 with the number XO138 on the vertical fin. I went over to it.

"LISTEN," said Clair. His voice carried well: "This is your first fight. I know I can trust you to do your best. We haven't practiced formation flying to any great extent. Not long enough, at any rate, to let you execute the strategy I outlined last night. You're on your own, and God bless you. You'll get further instructions from operations. Tune in on YB and stay there."

He turned away and started for his plane. I saw Evarts and Black at the ships on either side of me. I beckoned to them. "Let's stick together," I said over the growing mumble of the motors. "Okay," said Black.

"Who'll lead?" asked Evarts. "Feeney," said Black. Evarts nodded. They both went back to their planes.

We climbed in and pulled down our goggles. I let the rest taxi into position and take off. Then I waved my hand at Black and Evarts and started down the runway. The rest of the Flying Sharks were already spiraling for height above us. The topmost one caught the sun, and the newly painted black-and-white jaws of a man-eating shark glittered on the fuselage and on the airvents of the engine.

I took a short run and pulled up as sharply as I thought I could. The P-40 took it. I didn't know how many bombers were expected, how many escorts, what type of planes or their altitude. I tried to tune in the radio as I went up, but it was a finer job than I expected. I had no idea where the ground station YB might be located on the dial. I gave up.

I cranked the glass canopy of the P-40 shut over me. I knew enough

about these ships to leave it open until I was in the air. Sometimes they turned over on take-off, and it was better to have the top open.

I HEARD sirens below. I looked down. The Chinese crews, figures I had just seen dimly the day before, were bustling in and out of the hangar. Some of them were diving for the slit-trenches. Evidently the Nippers, as Clair liked to call them, weren't too far away. I wondered if they were bombing for us or for the Burma Road. I didn't care particularly, but it was something to think about. I flipped an eye at the altimeter. *Five thousand feet.* Not enough. I gave the throttle all the push it would take. I forgot to allow for clearance on the sides, and scraped my knuckles bloody.

Behind me, Evarts and Black were coming up through the mushy early morning air. We were in the sun now. I looked ahead. I could only see two or three P-40's. They were heading south and east. *Eight thousand feet.* Still climbing, I cut after the ships I saw ahead.

I turned on the gun-switch with my left hand and pressed the little knurled trigger on the stick. I heard the .50's chug, and the rattle of the .30's. Everything was fine. Behind me, Evarts and Black did the same.

In front, the P-40's I had seen a moment ago were vanishing. I had to make a decision. If I gave up trying to get some height, I could catch up. If I didn't, I would lose them.

I decided to lose them. Height, I knew, was stuff more precious than rubies in fighting. I pointed the nose of my ship a little steeper.

My mouth was dry and tight. I couldn't get any saliva to flow, but I kept swallowing on the off chance that a gland might change its mind. My stomach felt hollow as a log. "This is the real thing," I said aloud to myself. "No maneuvers this time." My voice (I had only one earphone on and no helmet) sounded thin and faint. It sounded scared.

Automatically, I had done all the things I was supposed to do. Usually I remembered each separate motion. This time I had gone through the routine, and not a bit of what I had done was in my consciousness. I had been in my little world for perhaps ten minutes. A world with a bright-white top of sun through the glass canopy and a dark-green base of painted fuselage and seat. I was squatting on a thin, silk-webbed Chinese 'chute. Before me was the jiggling black instrument-board.

I had yanked up the wheels, closed the radiator shutters, switched gas-tanks, adjusted the revolutions per minute of my prop. All the time, I kept looking for Japs: to east, south,

west and north. I had fixed my rudder and elevator tabs; I had taken a jerk at the six charging handles of the guns to make sure there were no jams. All the time, I looked for Japs. I had checked my dials and seen that everything was on the nose. I had taken a squint through my center sight and listened to the boom of the motor. All the time, I looked for Japs.

My sun-glasses were tight on my sweating nose. I always used them for flying because of the curious reflections and dazzlings in the air that sometimes blinded me. The tube of the oxygen tank was near me, just in case. I worried for a minute whether or not the Chinese mechanic had turned on the main tap in the fuselage. I switched the cockpit tap and felt the pressure of the gas on my fingertip. That was fine.

I WAS a god—except that I was blind under the wings and the tail and nose. But I didn't figure on any Japs turning up there. I checked my altimeter. *Twelve thousand feet.* I checked my wrist-watch. *Six o'clock.*

I leveled off and looked around. Evarts and Black were still with me, but just. They hadn't managed to climb so well. I kept up my speed and looked ahead. The other planes had disappeared. We were alone in a lonely blue sky.

My eyes kept swiveling around the horizon. They would begin to water, and I would watch the cockpit side for a second to refocus them. Then I'd start looking around again, my head swinging like a universal joint. . . .

Suddenly the sky was full of Jap bombers. Packed with them, it appeared, from horizon to horizon. There were, I found out afterward, only twenty-five, but it looked as if there were thousands. They were coming almost head-on toward us, but about two thousand feet below. They were in perfect formation, in a huge V composed of a mass of little v's—what the Royal Air Force over England in 1940 used to call a "Vic of vics."

My hands were wet. "Lucky the trigger on the stick is knurled," I thought. "My finger might slip." Good old manufacturer!

The Japanese bombers were going under me like a load of coal going down a chute. I could hear the off rhythm of their motors, like the beat of a Saturday back-porch washing machine, over the noise of my own. When I looked down at them, I had a glimpse of the ground. I must have been more than eighty miles away from the Timara field. Now there was no valley under me—nothing but blank brown mountains shooting up like broken dunce-caps with spots of

green at their bases. There was glimmering haze between me and the Japs.

Just before I dived, I looked around. I saw a P-40 hovering near me, and I thought I saw the bright flash of Evarts' hair.

There was no other ship about.

I didn't have time to think it over. My plane, like a hawk eager to get going, was already diving down, almost without my volition.

I came in from the right. I swung under the bombers and came up in a Susie curl under the leader. For some reason I wanted to get him in particular. I hung under on my prop and pressed the trigger on the stick. I could see the six red lines of tracers going into his belly. I saw something winking in a fiery fashion that seemed somehow friendly. It came from the bottom of the Jap bomber. But I knew that blinking was anything but friendly. The gunner in the gray belly of the Mitsubishi was firing at me. No sound—just the red winking.

My P-40 staggered before it fell off. I could see a hole or two in the wing, one of them an explosive tear. I was lucky so far. The gas-tanks hadn't been hit.

The lead Jap bomber kept on. It didn't change speed or level. I came in again with full throttle. It was easy enough to pick the formation up. It was going only about two hundred miles an hour. I was feeling sick in my stomach. If a long burst like that couldn't get him! I thought. Maybe it was armor.

I swung up again and gave the trigger a short split-second squeeze. No more than a dozen bullets could have gone out of the muzzles of my guns, even though I had a rate of forty-five slugs a second. But the Jap bomber stumbled in mid-air. The others at its wing-tips had to break formation to avoid hitting it. Smoke poured out of an engine in a black and greasy roll. The other engine began to miss. I saw flame coming from the left side. I pressed the trigger again. I felt happier than I had since I left Shandy.

The bomber started to sag. It turned in a smoking spiral, once around. Then, like a lead lump, it dropped. I had only seen that soggy kind of a fall once before—when I shot a mallard point-blank.

I gave it up and went after the one on the left lead. This time I hit something the first try: bits of the engine flew off; the bomber careened away almost immediately, out of control. I saw two Japs try to jump, and only one made it. The other was hit by the whirling wing. He must have been cut in half. His 'chute never opened, even if he pulled the rip-cord. I lost check on the other one.

I came through my flattening out. The formation was increasing its

speed. Suddenly I saw a bomber on the right start to break formation. It burst into lurid red flame, and I saw a P-40 hovering behind it. As I caught the momentary glimpse, I saw the red lines of the tracers jump out of the P-40 and into the middle of the bomber.

I didn't know who it was, Evarts or Black. I didn't have time to figure it out. I was under the belly of another bomber, squeezing the top of the stick until my scraped knuckles hurt. This bomber smoked too, after a second, but it kept its speed and formation.

The dustpan gun, the gun in the rear bay of that bomber, started to wink at me. I grinned and made a fade. I must have shouted: "Sticks and stones!" Then I started to whirl in a blackout world that was like a churning maelstrom.

It couldn't have been more than an instant, that swirling of dark space in my brain. I pulled myself up in my seat like a drunk coming to. There was blood on my forehead. It was sticky and salt in my mouth. There must be a lot of it, I thought, to get that far down.

The Jap formation was disappearing into the distance. I was doing a falling-leaf toward the ground. A flight of P-40s came over me, trying to catch up to the bombers. Nobody saw me. I grunted: "Too late for the fun!" I fumbled for the stick. It banged my hand a time or two, then settled down; I tried to get the ship into shape again.

NO good. It still went down. I looked at the wings. All intact. I turned around to try to get a glimpse of my tail. It was almost gone, torn away by what must have been cannon-fire.

"Okay," I said. "Okay." This is the time, I thought. This is the end of the line. I thought of Shandy, and knocked open my safety belt. I pushed back the canopy. Turning that crank took almost all the strength I had. I was surprised to find it was so hard.

The wind came in the opening, hitting the top of my sweated head like cold steel. I got up groggily—stood up in my seat as far as I could. I would have died there, because that was as far as I could go, except that in that minute the P-40 flipped over.

It tossed me like a pebble in a slingshot. Before it could happen, I was in the air end-over-end. The ground was a blur, but I knew I must have four thousand feet of air-space under. I felt for the big steel ring and yanked it.

The 'chute harness jerked my legs and shoulders upright. My head cleared. I opened one eye. The other was clotted shut with blood. The ground was under me, coming up

comfortably. I didn't know what would happen. I didn't care. I was happy and even a little sleepy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SHOULD I have wagged my wings? Should I have waved my hand? What did a leader do out here in Burma when he spotted the enemy? Was this still Burma?

How many should I write on my report? What number and what kind? Two? Or three? No less than two. Maybe four?

My brain was clear and lucid. I had never been so cozy and leisure-minded in my life. I felt as if I were in a faery world of light and ether. Nothing could harm me. There was no noise, only the vacuum, the good vacuum of eternity.

I looked down, and my comfortable state vanished. The ground seemed to be leaping up at me like an angry dog. I started to pull up on the shrouds. Save your legs, Feeney, I admonished my soul. Save the arches when you land. You have a long way back to Timara and beans.

I hit with a jar that knocked my lungs empty. My legs slapped the ground before I could remember to flex them. They sank in above the knees. Water and thick black mud squeeged over the tops of my boots.

"Well, for God's sake!" I said. I looked around. I was on the extreme edge of what appeared to be a green marsh. I unhooked the 'chute, and watched it blow away with no regret.

I lifted one leg, and the sucking sound was horrendous. I lifted the other gingerly and started to slosh through the mud and moss toward the solid ground. I had taken a half dozen steps when I heard a voice.

"*Harushu!*" it said. Something like that. It was a singsong tone; but the command—there was no mistake about it; it was a command—was loud and firm. I raised my eyes—not too quickly, because I didn't want whoever it was to get any false ideas.

It was a Chinese. He was standing at the border of the swamp, dressed in ragged blue pants and a long blue coat that looked as if it were quilted. He was holding a Springfield rifle.

"Put it away!" I told him. "Don't take on! I'm a friend!"

The Chinese jerked the gun-muzzle up a little. There was no mistake about what he meant. His sign-language was perfect. I stood still and put my hands up.

He motioned for me to keep coming. I did. Finally I got on dry land and stood there draining. The Chinese looked at me. A wide smile began to appear on his face. I was fascinated by its growth. It first came into sight



Major Rees

as a grimace, then a smile, and finally a grin that I was afraid would detach his ears.

He started to giggle. I took a step forward. He stopped instantly. He leveled the gun again and said something in a high monotone. He swung the rifle significantly. I got it. He wanted me to go ahead of him. We started up the hill that bordered the swamp.

The climb was longer than I liked. I felt unaccountably tired. I didn't like going away from the spot where I figured I could make a search for my plane.

But I couldn't explain to the Chinese. He kept me ahead of him, and dug the gunsight into my back whenever I slowed up. He did let me stop and pour the water and mud out of my boots. However, he balked at my wringing out my socks. I had to put the boots back on and get along. The thought occurred to me, and I began to whistle a flat version of "*Get Along, Little Dogie*." As long as I whistled, no matter how slowly I went, the Chinese stopped prodding me. When I ceased, he began again. He was a music-lover.

We were going up the side of a hill, winding back and forth on a switchback path that ran between huge bare boulders. The earth was eroded. There was no sign of vegetation—or sign of any living thing, except the path, which seemed to be packed down well enough by some kind of animal, maybe human. I wanted to ask where we were going, but I knew my limitations and the limitations of my captor.

Finally we were approximately halfway up the side of the mountain. I got a left jab. I turned left. The path led abruptly along a cliff with a drop that must have been nearly a hundred yards down, then curved in again. We were standing in front of the mouth of a cave partially blocked

with stones. I looked over my shoulder. There was a magnificent view behind me. I felt a premonitory prickle running up my back.

"A listening post!" I said.

"Quite right," said a voice in English. I whipped my head back into place.

A Chinese officer, with an intelligent, high-boned face, was looking at me.

"You are—" He left it unfinished.

"Arch Feeney." The officer seemed surprised. "Feeney?" he repeated. "*Fenshui*," he said aside to my guard. They both laughed. The officer turned to me. "Forgive me," he said. "We have so little to laugh at up here. We must take every opportunity."

"I noticed that when your friend picked me up," I said slowly. "What's so funny about Feeney? It's a good Irish name."

"It is also a good Chinese name," the officer said hastily. "A very good name. I made what you call a pun. *Fenshui*. That means, in English, a good spirit."

"Okay," I said. "Can I get dry or am I a prisoner of war?"

"Are you English?" asked the officer. His close-shaved head had a glow in the sunlight.

"American."

"Ah! Americans do not shoot down Japanese planes."

"This one does."

"So? Are you alone?" asked the Chinese officer.

"No," I told him. "I'm a part of your own army. I'm a pilot with Colonel Clair."

"Colonel Clair?"

"The Flying Sharks."

The Chinese officer's face lit up as though someone had turned on an electric bulb inside. "Flying Sharks!" he said. His voice had reverence, amazement, praise and hallelujah in it. He clapped his hands. He rattled off something to the man who had captured me, and the fellow bowed his head almost to the ground.

"We are so honored," said the Chinese officer. He bowed himself. "So honored," he repeated. He was almost stuttering. "Our friends," he said. "Come, you will be our guest."

WARY at this sudden change of things, I followed him inside the cave. It was dark, and my eyes could see nothing for a moment.

The officer's voice boomed in my ear in Chinese sibilants. I vaguely saw a row of people bowing before me. I heard the officer's voice again in my ear. "I have told them who you are," he said. "They are greatly honored to welcome a member of the First American Recruit Group."

The second installment of "From Some Higher Place" will appear in our forthcoming January issue.

The Masked Marvel



ONE thing leads to another," said Squaredeal Sam McGhee. "We started out by talkin' about horses; then somethin' was said about stud, an' the first thing you know me an' this feller was havin' a little game o' poker."

I recognized the gambit to a touch. But Sam's preambles are always disastrously alluring. I nodded toward the box of cigars; Sam selected a hand-ful, lighted one, and sprawled back in his chair, emanating smoke and satisfaction.

"But this unfortunate 'feller,'" I guessed, "apparently didn't know you used to deal three-card monte with a carny?"

"I don't never discuss backgrounds with strangers," said Sam with simple dignity. "It might embarrass them—not to mention *vicey-versy*. Besides, this feller could afford to lose. His name was Pat Pending. He was a great inventor—"

"Already the tale sounds incredible," I said. "But go ahead."

WELL (Squaredeal Sam began), I met this here Pending at the Sportsman's Club. He was a big ugly red-headed mick an' he talked funny. He played poker likewise. He stayed in on three-card flushes, drew to middle straights, an' his idee of good clean fun was to raise into a locked hand.

Under them circumstances, what

could I do? He give me his cash in the first hour, his war bonds in the next, an' I could've had his shirt if it had fit me. Naturally, he was gettin' worriered an' worriered by the minute. Finally on my deal I bust out a new deck for luck, an' I dole him a king in the hole with two more kings an' a pair of aces on top: kings full. I had two aces an' a pair o' queens showin'.

"Aces an' bulls," I said, "is high. Your bet."

He studied the hands, his buckteeth hangin' out; then he wriggled like a housewife with ants in her pantry.

"Mr. McGhee," he bleated, "I want to bet this hand, but you've won all my money. Would you be willing to bet all my losses so far against my latest inventulation?"

That was the way he talked, y'understand. Whenever he got excited he run the King's English through the mangler. I eyed him thoughtful.

"That depends," I told him. "What is it?"

"Come with me," he said, "and I'll show you. We'll seal these hands and leave them with Hodgins till you decide. But I'm sure you'll agree. My inventulation is stupendically important. One of the greatest things ever discovered by man. It hasn't even been patented yet. Well?"

"Okay," I said. "I'll take a look."

So we sealed the two hands an' left

them in care of Hodgins, the club steward. Then we grabbed a cab, but not to Pending's apartment, like I'd figgered. We went to the Lakeview Country Club. Pending parked me at the first tee.

"You wait here," he said. "I'll be right back with him."

"Him?" I ast.

"It," said Pending, an' disappeared into the locker-room.

I WAS still standin' there wonderin' if he ought to be salted an' served with beer, when back he come, draggin' in tow the strangest-lookin' jasper I ever clamped glims on. My poker-playin' sucker—I mean, friend—wasn't exactly what you might call a beauty-contest winner hisself, but he was a pin-up boy compared to this new-comer.

The guy was built all right—sort of slim an' tall an' whippy, like an athlete—but he walked like a mamma duck with arthritis; jerky an' stiff, you know, like his knees was sayin', "You let me past this time an' I'll let you past next time."

An' his face! Well, did you ever see a rough model of a zombie's death-mask in clay? This guy looked like that. His flesh was the color of a par-boiled parsnip, and had about as much rise-an-shine. If they was any sparkle in his eyes, you couldn't see it no-how, on account of he was wearing



A story wherein Pat Pending sells one of his marvelous inventions to Sam McGhee (remember Sam's Centaur?) and an exciting time is had by all.

by NELSON BOND

big black sunglasses. He was a beaut, all right!

Pending said: "Mr. McGhee, this is Homer. . . . Homer, shake hands with Mr. McGhee."

He patted his friend on the back real affectionate-like, an' this Homer lurched toward me like a cow on a pogo-stick. I ignored his outstretched flipper an' glared at Pending.

"Say, what's the gag? You brung me out here to see some kind of invention."

"Shortly. . . . Shortly," soothed the redhead. "First I thought you might like to see Homer play a few holes of golf. He's *very* good."

"Now, look here!" I began. Then I stopped. Homer was apparently a man with a one-track mind. Despite the fact I wasn't payin' him no heed, he'd grabbed my mitt, and with that pale anemic-lookin' flipper of his, wet an' cold as the inside of an old rubber boot, he was practically yankin' it off at the wrist. "Hey!" I yelled. "Leggo!"

Pending said hastily, "Er—that'll do, Homer!" and patted his pal on the back again. Homer let loose an' backed away without sayin' a word.

Pending said apologetically: "He doesn't know his own strength, Mr. McGhee. I'm very sorry."

"You're sorry!" I growled. "What's the matter with your buddy? Can't he beg his own pardon?"

Pat said, "Well, you see, Mr. McGhee, Homer doesn't know he hurt you."

"Well, I'm tellin' him!"

"Er—yes. But he can't hear you."

Came the dawn. "Oh!" I said. "I see. Deef, eh?"

"That's right. And he can't apologize for himself, because he can't talk. But he *can* play golf. Watch!" An' Pending pushed a wooden tee into the ground, placed a ball on it, an' crossed to Homer's side. He picked a club out of the bag he'd brung with him, handed it to his friend, an' prodded Homer forward with pats on the back an' a runnin' fire of encouragin' comment.

"Show Mr. McGhee what a good golfer you are, Homer. Address the

ball . . . There, that's right! Now, let's see—the green's about four hundred and twenty-five yards dead ahead. Ready? Very well—"

"If he's deaf," I said, "how come you talk to him?"

Pat just smiled.

"Very well, Homer," he said then. "Swing!"

Homer swung. That is, I suppose he swung. Because somethin' went *swoosh* an' somethin' went *splat!* . . . An' when I stopped blinkin' the ball an' tee had vanished, an' Homer was standin' there motionless. Whether he had actually moved was somethin' I couldn't swear to; all I'd seen was a brief blur.

But he must've hit that ball, because there it was rollin' down the fairway, dead center—onto the apron of the green *four hundred yards away!*

SQUAREDEAL SAM paused to break the ash of his cigar into the cuff of his trousers. "Good for the moths," he said thoughtfully.

"Good for them, your Aunt Tillie!" I retorted. "It kills them!" And I stared at him in some pique. "Look here, Sam, are you trying to tell me this Homer person drove a golf ball four hundred yards?"

"I aint just tryin'," said Sam. "I'm tellin'."

"But that's incredible!" I protested. "It can't be done! The record is—"

"Six hundred an' thirty-seven," supplied Sam. "Jim Braid done it, 'way back when. I looked it up."

"But that was on ice," I said, "in the winter. And he had a stiff tailwind."

"This Homer was a cool customer, too," said Sam.

Nevertheless (so Sam continued), I don't much blame you for doubtin' me. I didn't believe my own eyes when I seen it happen. But Pending yelled, "Nice shot, Homer. Oh, a *lovely* shot!" He banged his pal on the back, clutched my elbow, an' before I could say anything we was walkin' down the fairway.

The ball was on the very edge of the green. It was a slopin' green—one o' those things where if you don't

play strong enough you're short o' the cup, an' if you play it too strong you overrun the hole about ten feet. . . . A nasty putt.

Cluckin' an' chirrupin' like a bird in a hedge, Pat guided his morgue-meat friend to the ball an' shovin' a putter into his hands, he said, "About twenty-four feet, I'd say—wouldn't you, Mr. McGhee? Go ahead, Homer. Putt!"

Homer putted. But none o' that crouchin' an' sizin' up the layout like you see most golfers do, none o' that testin' the wind, or fingerin' the grass to get the run of it. Homer just putted. The ball rolled up the slope, not too fast, not too slow, an' curled into the can for an eagle two!

An eagle! Imagine that! Two under par on the very first hole! An' that was just the beginnin'. We went to the second tee. Again Pending squirmed an' fidgeted an' beat his buddy on the back, an' again Homer busted one down the middle o' the fairway. This time he had bad luck, though. His ball kicked into a bunker about two hundred yards from the green.

I said, "Tough luck, Homer! You'll have to waste a niblick shot gettin' out o' there."

"He can't hear you, Mr. McGhee."

"Well, then maybe he can feel me bein' sorry," said I. "Bein' a golfer myself—"



"Mr. McGhee, I want to bet, but you've won all my money."



I sauntered past Pat and gave him the business.

"Oh, then you play?"

"A little. I aint so good."

"No? What seems to be the trouble?"

"Well—distance, mostly. I stand too close to the ball after I hit it. I got a few other faults, such as not bein' able to use the woods or the irons—"

Pat said shrewdly: "You'd like to be a good golfer, wouldn't you?"

"Sure. An' I'd like to be Frank Sinatra, too, only it makes me nervous to hear women scream. So what?"

"So," said Pending, "would you like to take lessons from the finest golfer in the world?"

"Oh!" I said flatly. "So that's it? The invention gag was just a trick to get me out here an' sell me a bill o' goods on takin' golf lessons from this here friend of yours?" I turned toward the clubhouse. "Well, thanks for the mummery—but I aint havin' none. Poker's my athaletic exercise."

Pat grabbed my arm.

"Wait!" he said. "Watch Homer make this shot, will you?" We had reached the bunker, where the ball was half hid under a clump o' dried grass. Pending took the Number 7 iron out of his bag, handed it to Homer. "About two hundred yards, Homer. Take plenty of turf." He massaged his buddy's dorsal fins as usual. "All set? Then—swing!"

This time I seen Homer swing. That is, part of it. A cloud of dirt an' shredded grass blotted out the grand finale, as Homer, obeyin' orders, took plenty of turf.

But the result was what counted. An' the result—when the dust-clouds rolled away—was that the ball eased to a lazy, rollin' stop eight feet from the pin!

"Wonderable!" yelped Pat Pending. "Oh, certainaceously marvular, don't you agree, Mr. McGhee?"

"It—it's not bad," I admitted. "Only I still say I didn't come here to watch a golf exhibition. I come to see an invention—"

"Well," beamed Pending, "you've seen it!"

I stared at him. "Huh?"

"Homer," said Pat.

"Homer? I don't get you. What—"

"Look!" grinned the inventor, an' scurried to where our pile-drivin' companion stood motionless. "You've noticed the way I touch Homer's back every time he's getting ready to make a shot, haven't you?"

"Yes," I said, "come to think of it."

"Well," chuckled Pending, "while I was doing that I adjusted the dials for the proper distance and power. On his back, you see, is—"

He lifted his pal Homer's shirt, an' I sat down, sudden an' hard, on the nearest bunker. Because his golf-playin' friend didn't have no back. Leastwise, no back like you an' me got, with skin, an' floatin' ribs, an' vertigris an' the like.

No, his southern exposure was nothin' but one big panel full of dials, buttons, an' levers atween his shoulder-blades. Homer was a robot!

SQUAREDEAL SAM paused, with a hopeful glance toward the decanters on my bookcase. "Hot!" he hinted. "Funny how dry your mouth gets—"

"Help yourself," I told him, and watched admiringly as he drained at a gulp two jiggers of water diluted with one glass of rye. Then: "A robot, Sam?" I repeated. "You mean a mechanical man?"

Sam nodded. "Exactly! A walkin' creature of metal an' plastic an' some kind o' rubber composition. Electricity for a ticker, an' a calculatin' machine for a brain—"

"But a golfing robot!" I protested. "That's almost impossible! How would he—it—know how hard to hit a ball, or which club to use?"

"Them gadgets on his back, like I told you. An' he had somethin' like range-finders for eyes. It didn't make no difference to him how many rolls they was on a green; he just lined up his putt, the addin'-machine inside him measured the angles, an' zowie!—in the bucket! Homer couldn't miss. He didn't have no nerves to get jangly, or emotions to get upset. He was steady—steady like a rock."

"Why, all the sports-writers said he was the perfect golfer. Better'n Bob Jones, even. When he won the Greenview Open—"

"Greenview Open!" I interrupted. "Hold everything, Sam! Stanislaus Steele won the Greenview Open—the one they called the Masked Marvel. You don't mean to tell me—"

Sam nodded slowly. "That was him," he said. . . .

Yes, Homer was the Masked Marvel (repeated Sam sorrowfully). After I won my bet with Pending, I become Homer's new manager an' owner. Bein' a good businessman, I right away reckonized the possibilities Pending hadn't saw. His only idea had been to rent Homer out as a golf-instructor. I seen immediate how we could mop up a little filthy sugar in the big tournaments.

"You an' me'll be pardners," I told Pending. "I'll cut you in for twenty per cent. You keep Homer in good repair an' I'll handle the finances. Incidentally, what makes Homer work?"

"Why," explained Pending, "the accumulizing of ohmical electriculosity impingimates on the rheostats I built in him. That causes him to respondulate with mathemaceous calcularity when the proper buttons are pressed—"

That's what I mean about Pending. His language was okay except when he got excited, or was tryin' to explain one of his inventulations.

"Never mind," I said. "You service him. I'll take care o' the finances. Now, the first thing we'll do is put a mask on him."

"Mask?" repeated Pending. "But why?"

"Because he's got a mesh flesh with a green sheen," I said, "which sooner or later somebody's going to figure out he's as phoney as an executive's desk unless we hide his face under something. Anyhow, it'll be good publicity: The first golfer in hist'ry to cover his grins on the greens."

"You're not going to try to pass him off as a human?" asked Pat dubiously.

"Why not? He fooled me, didn't he?"

"But he can't talk."

"So much the better. That'll make him all the more mysterious. All the golfers I ever met up with had hoof-an'-mouth disease—hoof all day an'

mouth all night. They won't understand his silence, an' that'll unnerve his opponents."

"We-e-ell," said Pat, "it doesn't sound quite ethical to me. Honesty is the best policy."

"Yeah, but policies don't pay off till you're dead. Now, you just leave everything to me. I know what I'm doin'. We'll start off by enterin' him in the Greenview Open; that's next week. You can be his caddy. That'll give you an opportunity to set his controls for each shot. Okay?"

"I don't like it," sighed Pending. "But if you say so, okay."

An' there we left it.

WELL, since you read about that tournament, I won't keep you on tenderhooks about what happened.

My intention was to enter Homer as the "Masked Marvel," an' let it go at that. But Pending, who filled out the entry card, was suddenly taken ethical an' in the space where it said *Birthplace* he wrote: "Stainless Steel Works." Luckily, Pending's handwriting was as bad as his poker, an' the Greens Committee thought it said: "Stanislaus Steele, Warsaw." That's how Homer come to be known as the "Poundin' Pole."

We played that whole tournament cagey. It wasn't a big one, an' my idea was just to find out how good Pending could control the robot under actual playin'-conditions, to pick up a few bucks on side bets, an' to win Homer a bit of a reputation so's he'd be invited to enter the National Open—which same I done, all of them.

"Excuse me a minute, Sam," I interrupted. "National Open? Isn't that being played right now?"

"You are so right," sighed Square-deal Sam. And he continued:

The Greenview Open made Homer's name. I should say it made "Stanislaus Steele's" name. We eased him along, only turnin' on the heat when we had to, just takin' each opponent by enough margin to win, but not enough to discourage anybody or make anybody suspicious.

We took the first match three-and-two, the second two-and-one, an' the quarter-finals on the first extry hole. Pending pulled only one boner in the entire tournament. In the semi-final match, on the ninth tee he twisted the dial a trifle too far. It was a 368-yard hole. Homer not only reached the green; he overdrove it. Seein' as how the wind was in his face, people talked about this.

As we walked down the fairway, Pending whispered to me, "I'm sorry, Mr. McGhee. I didn't mean to twist that dial so far."

"That's okay," I told him. "It's good publicity—once. But don't let it happen again."

So he didn't, an' though Homer never come near duplicatin' that drive again, the sports-writers gleefully tagged him with the title, "Poundin' Pole," an' a star was born when we won the tournament on the last hole, one up.

After that, just like I'd expected, they give Homer an invite to enter the National Open. An' the stage was ripe for the kill. . . .

Squaredeal Sam paused, shaking his head slowly from side to side.

I grinned.

"When better metaphors are mixed, Sammy, you'll mix them. But I'm afraid I'm getting sort of confused here. The National Open is being played right now—this weekend. It's been on for three days. Didn't Homer enter?"

"Enter!" snorted Sam. "'Course he entered! What's the matter with you, don't you never read the newspapers?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I've been rather busy," I apologized. "Got a new story under way—"

"You writers!" sniffed Sam.

"I've barely had time to glance at the headlines."

"Don't use that word," begged Sam. "It sounds like *breadlines*!"

Well (shrugged Sam), this year's National wasn't as clogged with Big Names as usual, so many of the boys bein' in uniform, but the competition was still plenty tough. Sarazen was entered, an' Sammy Byrd an' Turnesa an'— Oh, shucks! You know their names as well as I do.

Homer qualified in the medal play with a modest 71-72-143. He could've won it easy if we'd wanted him to. But the medal play was only a lovin'-cup, an' I made Pat keep him under wraps. I was out for bigger stakes—\$1000 first prize an' sucker money on



I just had time to hand-mashie it over the fence.

the side when we got into the match play.

Which same I found, an' plenty! Golf bugs is crazy when it comes to backin' their favorites. We met a young pro from Minnesota in the first match; he'd qualified with a 138, compared to Homer's 143, an' his friends figured he was good enough to eliminate Homer. When the dust cleared away, Homer had won, three-an'-two, an' I'd eliminated a hundred smackers out o' some slightly bitter Swedes.

We took Sammy Byrd two-an'-one in the second round, which same I was sorry to do, on account me an' Sammy is pals. But business is business, an' they was a galleryite which was anxious to back the ex-Yankee outfielder two yards' worth.

That brung us into the quarter-finals. We had some trouble in that round—yestiddy morning that was, by the way—because our opponent was off his game, an' he was all over the course like crab-grass. I told Pat, "Stick with him. If Homer whips him too bad, we won't be able to *buy* a bet around here."

Pending nodded an' pounded Homer's back approvingly as the robot stepped up to the tee. Homer's drive was like a bullet, as usual, but smack into the woods, like Pat had meant it to be. From then on we had a wildcat scramble—the other guy hookin' an' slicin' an' missin' putts, an' Homer matchin' him muff for muff, top for top, to keep the contest somewhere near even up to the last hole. Which same, at my nod, we won with a birdie three to take the match.

SINCE that was the morning round, all the wise guys figured Homer was a soft touch for a licking in the p.m., so I wrapped up a neat bundle when he hammered out a snappy four under par to go into the finals.

Well, if you'd been readin' the papers, or at least the sports pages, like you ought, you'd know we met "Ironman" Wilksen in the showdown. He got his nickname because he's an expert with the irons, an' because he's such a steady golfer. The playoff match was thirty-six holes, eighteen this morning an' eighteen in the afternoon.

They was a lot of excitement when we turned up this morning at the clubhouse. A big gallery was gathered at five bucks per head, newspaper reporters an' cameramen was out for stories, pitchers an' free drinks, contact-men was there from all the big golf-equipment manufacturin' companies to sign up the winner for advertisin' purposes.

The reporters was particularly troublesome, because they kept beggin' for a few words with Homer. "Just a word," they kept sayin'. "We've got

to get a statement, Mr. McGhee, in case he wins—"

"I've told you boys," I repeated for maybe the hundredth time, "Stanislaus is deaf an' dumb. I do his talkin'. If you'll come back after the match—"

"Then how about letting him slip off his mask, just for us? Why does he play in a mask, anyway? Who is he?"



He lifted Homer's shirt an' it was nothin' but one big panel full of dials.

Let us have one picture of him without the mask—"

I finally shooed them out o' there, explainin' that Homer had to dress. Pending was worried; he said: "It's not so good, Mr. McGhee. People are starting to get curious. We better win quick, and blow before they—"

"Nonsense!" I snorted. "We'll play it like I planned it and make a killing. Let Homer lose this morning—"

"Lose!"

"You heard me. Let him go into the afternoon round about three down. That'll build up the odds. I've won seven hundred on him already, in this an' the Greenview tournament. I'll get three-to-one at lunch, lay it all on his nose—"

"And then?" asked Pat.

"And then," I told him, "we lift scalps!"

Well, Pat done like I said. He got quite a chuckle from the audience, the way he chattered to Homer, encouragin' him with pats on the back—but them back-pats did the trick.

With a fluff here an' a short putt here, we managed to get three down on the morning eighteen. That's how it was when we went to lunch. Pat ate. I didn't. I was busy hunting up fat rolls to cover my lean one. I found them, too. I ended up with an average of almost four-to-one—about twenty-five hundred we stood to collect when Homer come hammerin' home a winner.

"An' that not countin' the prize money," I told Pat cheerfully. "It's all over but the shoutin' now, son."

Pat nodded. "Yes, I suppose so, Mr. McGhee. But I still don't think it's ethical."

"Pooh!" I said.

"And it looks like rain," said Pending.

"So let it!" I sniffed. "That'll hurt Wilksen more than it will Homer. He could get distance in a blizzard."

"Yes," said Pat, "but if it rains—"

"You'll get wet an' ruin your clothes?" I chuckled. "So what? We'll

We won that hole, leavin' Homer one down.

The fourth and fifth holes was push, but Homer took the sixth when Wilksen lost his ball an' conceded. With golf-balls as scarce as they is, it was a shame to lose that there one. . . . Brand new it was, without a mark.

So the match was even up again, with only twelve to play.

It was right about that time it started raining—a slow drizzle, hardly enough to hurt the course. But I didn't want to stay out in the rain all afternoon if I could help it, so I give Pat the nod. And then's when he turned on the heat—an' I do mean heat!

Homer won the par four seventh with a birdie three. Wilksen blew on the eighth, an' Homer's par was good enough. Pat had to sink a long, curly 40-footer to win the ninth—which he did, with the aid of Homer's telescopic optics. And Wilksen, who'd started this final round three up, was now that many down.

The tenth hole, a pitch-an'-putt shot, was push. A 225-yard brassie dead to the pin give Homer the eleventh, an' put the other so-called "Iron-man" four down. And on the twelfth hole, Homer pitched a Number 6 iron shot to within four feet of the cup, dropped the putt for an eagle three, an' put Wilksen five down, with five holes to play. Dormie five.

On the way to the thirteenth tee I sauntered past Pat and give him the business out of the corner of my mouth.

"Now," I said. "It's startin' to rain harder; take this hole an' we'll go home."

"Yes, Mr. McGhee," he said. Then: "*Homer! Careful where you're going!*" He hurried to the robot's side, grabbed him and pawed at his back just in time to keep pal Homer from taking a header into a sand-trap. "Over that way, Homer." To me he said apologetically, "I'm sorry, Mr. McGhee. Must have pushed the wrong button—"

"Well, push the right ones about three times more," I told him, "and the game's over. Meet you at the clubhouse. I'll have the money."

An' because it was starting to pour down in buckets by now, I pulled my coat-collar up around my ears an' lit out for a dry shelter and a wet refreshment. . . .

I should've known better than to leave. I began to get curious about ten minutes after I'd reached the clubhouse porch, an' still nobody else had follyed me in off the links. I'd been expectin' the gallery, soakin' wet, to come back any minute. But they didn't.

Another five minutes, and I wasn't curious any more—I was anxious. An'

be able to buy out the best tailor in town, soon as we win. Come on."

We got Homer, marched him out to the tee, an' began the final eighteen holes of play.

HOMER took the hole with par figures. My advice to Pat was get even as quick as possible without lettin' Homer do anything unusual. Wilksen's drive found a sand-trap, an' since I was part of the gallery that reached there before he did, somebody stepped on the ball and squashed it in the grit before he got there.

The second hole bein' a short par three, with the green in plain sight of the tee, was a break-even. Both players was on in one, an' it would of looked bad for Homer to sink a thirty-five-foot putt this early in the game. So Pat let him play an approach—which incidentally give me time to get across to the third fairway, right over the rise where Wilksen's drive had fell on the morning round.

It landed in practically the same spot again. This time, though, when I strolled over to take a look at it I saw it was in a cuppy lie. Bein' a good sportsman, I fluffed the grass around it to sort of give Wilksen a break—an' I guess I must have fluffed it too much, because when he addressed it the ball wobbled off the turf an' rolled five inches, costin' Wilksen a stroke. . . . A tough break.



Illustrated by Charles Chickering

with reason! For just then one of the newspaper reporters came runnin' in, all excited. He grabbed the phone and dialed a number.

"Hey, Chief!" he bawled. "Kill that lead about the Masked Marvel winning! The match has gone haywire. Call you as soon as I get the results!"

He hung up and started out again. I caught him an' yelled: "What do you mean—haywire? What's happened?"

"Plenty! The Marvel's blown sky-high and Wilksen's taken the last three holes. They're playing the seventeenth now and he's only one down!" He paused and pointed. "No! See? The hole's finished, and they're walking to the eighteenth tee! Wilksen won that one, too, and it's even up! What a match! What a match!"

BOTH players got off their drives while I was on my way to Homer an' Pending. Wilksen's was the kind the duffers dream about . . . two hundred seventy-five right down the middle of the fairway.

Homer outdrove him by eighty yards, but the trouble was his was a low, slanting slice that ducked into the jungle and would've been out-of-

bounds if I hadn't been the first to reach it. As it was, I just barely had time to locate it an' hand-mashie it over the fence when the gallery, headed by Pat an' Homer, tromped into the forest.

I grabbed Pat's arm and ast him: "What in blazes is goin' on? You aint gone conscientious at the last minute, I hope!"

Pending said worriedly, "No, Mr. McGhee. It—it's Homer. The rain—"

"What about Homer? And what about the rain?"

"It—it got into him!" whispered Pending bleakly. "The water soaked in through some of his joints. He's short-circuited! That's why he's driving the ball all over the course! His controls don't work right!"

"They've got to work right!" I hissed. "We've got thirty-five hundred dollars dangling on the next couple of shots, Pat!"

"I'm doing my best," moaned the inventor. "But—"

He shrugged and moved to Homer's side, placed a Number 3 wood in the robot's hands. The ball was settin' up on a nice tuft o' grass, an' we was about two hundred-odd yards off the green. Wilksen had already shot, an'

his iron was about fifteen yards off the apron.

"About two-ten," clucked Pending, paddling Homer's back. "A high spoon shot right over those trees. Swing!"

Homer swooshed an' the gallery gasped as the ball lashed off the head of his club like a bullet out of a pistol.

THEN I seen what Pending meant: Because that ball was still rising when it topped the trees. It was at the top of its rise when it reached the green. That drive was on its way for at least four hundred or five hundred yards!

I groaned. When an' if that ball ever come down, we still had as long a shot to the green as we'd started with—

An' then we got a break. The ball hit the roof of the caddyhouse, bounced fifty feet in the air, hit the limb of a tree, bounced off the fender of a parked automobile, an' rolled down the incline to the green—less than two feet from the pin!

Well, I'll say one thing for Wilksen. He was game. He didn't bat an eyelash at seein' Homer's lucky break sew up the old ball game. He crouched over his Number 8 iron, approached, an' run his ball up to within inches of the pin. It was a concede—an' with the consent of Pending, the other caddy tossed the ball back to Wilksen.

This left only one final act to the drayma. Homer had to sink a two-foot putt to win the match.

The newspaper cameramen was all around, focused to record the title-winnin' putt for the newsreels. The gallery circled the green, hardly breathin', as Pat urged Homer forward.

"Easy now, Homer!" I heard him whisperin' hoarsely. "Just one teensy-weensy putt and it's all over. A straight one, about twenty-two inches. Ready? All right—*putt!*"

There was dead silence for a moment. I glanced at Squaredale Sam, who sat steeped in gloomy reverie, staring at the decanters again.

"Well, Sam?" I asked. "Did he sink it?"

Sam groaned.

"Would I be here now if he had've? No, he didn't sink it. Instead of puttin', that darn' fool robot *swung!* He r'ared back on his plastic heels and sloughed into that ball with all his might!

"I don't know where that ball landed. What's more, I don't think *anybody's* ever goin' to know where that ball landed. He was facin' east when he swung. The ball was just really beginnin' to rise when it cleared the clubhouse roof, three hundred yards away, by at least a good fifty feet.

"We watched it—me an' Pat an' the gallery—with open mouths until it turned into a dark speck in the sky, an' disappeared. We seen an airy-plane suddenly shift its course a couple minutes later; we aint sure, o' course, but we *think* the pilot was duckin' out o' the way of what he must've thought was ack-ack fire. . . . So the match was lost—an' all my bets with it."

"And that," I said as Sam paused, "is why you're here? Well—how much this time, Sam?"

"A hundred will do it, I think," said Sam.

"You mean repair him so he can play again?" I shook my head. "I'm af-aid not, Sam. By this time, everyone must know the Masked Marvel was a robot."

Sam nodded. "That's right, they do. I already made my apologies to the greens committee for enterin' him under false pretenses. Told 'em it was just a joke—a sort of a publicity stunt. They been right nice about it—"

"Well, then what earthly reason—"

"That's just it—an *earthly* reason! 'Cause, you see, Homer didn't *stop* swingin' after that last, match-losin' poke. He kept right on. He swung again . . . an' again . . . an' again. Pat can't get near him to turn him off, on account he's likely to get his head chopped off. With each shot, Homer digs up another bucketload o' dirt. When I left the club two hours ago, he was standin' at the bottom of a hole thirty feet deep—an' still goin' strong!

"I figger that for a hundred bucks we can take that putter out of his hands, equip him with a shovel . . . an' rent him to the United States Government. At the rate he's goin' now, he ought to have a hole dug deep enough for a land invasion o' Japan inside another month!"

I surrendered meekly. I always surrender to Sam's touches. Silently I handed him the needed hundred, confident I would hear from neither it, nor Sam, until the dire finger of fate again intervened in my yarn-spinning friend's affairs.

But as he rose to go, a final thought struck me.

"There's just one more thing, Sam," I said. "You said you won Homer from this Pending chap in a poker game?"

"That's right."

"But you said Pending had kings full over aces. You had a pair of aces and a pair of queens showing. What could you possibly have had to beat him?"

"Oh, that!" said Squaredeal Sam. "Another ace, o' course. Didn't I tell you we was playin' dealer's choice? It was my deal—an' I chose to play with a pinochle deck."



Desperate, stabbed, Ranger leaped aside. No time to prime pistols! His heavy stick whirled.

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER LUNDGREN came into the queer workshop on the boat deck of the *Cræsus*, serving in the Mediterranean not only as a supply ship but as transport and tender and anything else necessary to the invasion forces. He drew a chair up to the table where Lieutenant-commander Cosgrave was working at a drafting board.

"John," he said with an embarrassed air, "I was just talking with the General. It seems he's caught some rumor of our Experiment Nine Hundred Ninety-nine, off Syracuse," said

Lundgren. "He wants us to repeat it. Just for him alone. Tonight."

Cosgrave's head jerked up. "No!" he said sharply.

"Yes," said Lundgren.

Cosgrave looked at him for a minute, then pushed away his work.

"You know we've laid that aside until after the war."

"Only temporarily, John. We're going ahead with our work; you're finishing that diagram now for our next experimental hook-up. We're really getting somewhere at last."

Cosgrave fought back his anger, which was close to fear. After all, he

Naples Midnight

A COUNTERCLOCKWISE STORY THAT HARKS BACK FROM ITALY TODAY
TO LORD NELSON AND AN AMERICAN SHIPMASTER OF 1798.

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

and Lundgren were full partners in this thing. Their work with electronics and with radar had produced such striking results that now they were teamed in the effort to carry it on to extremes that staggered the imagination. Lundgren had a right to voice his desires.

"Nine Ninety-nine ought to be a closed book," he said slowly, his aquiline features tensed. "It failed; we missed our aim. Instead, we got something that we ourselves don't understand. Until we do, we ought not to monkey with it."

"Unless we repeat it, we can't hope to understand it," said Lundgren. So obviously true was this that Cosgrave bit his lip, at a loss for argument. Lundgren went on speaking gravely:

"You and I, and the job we're trying to do, have been swept away in the flood of war. We wanted to work under battle conditions, and got more than we bargained for. First North Africa, then Sicily, and now—this. Why grind eternally at a useless job? We need a bit of relaxation. Let's take it with Nine Ninety-nine, deliberately."

Cosgrave pondered.

True, they had been given this naval workshop to find the battle conditions they wanted, with bombs and planes and heavy guns turning the earth's atmosphere into hellish chaos. The *Cræsus* had been among the first ships to reach the Sicilian beachheads; they were carried with it; and now they were hurtling ahead with the fleet for the first landing on the mainland.

But Cosgrave knew that he and Lundgren had thus far failed of their own objectives. This depressed him, left him worried and uneasy.

"Frankly, I'm a bit afraid of that experiment," he said slowly. "It jumps us slap into the unknown. Also, this is no time for such didos, with the rumors that are flying. We've heard Italy has surrendered; we've heard that we're going to occupy Naples and Rome and take on the

Germans in Northern Italy—but it's all rumor. And everybody's on edge. What did you tell the General?"

"There's only one thing to tell that guy; what he wants to know," Lundgren replied. "He said he'd be right along. And here he is."

THE door opened. Into the top-deck cabin walked the hard-boiled, hard-eyed Old Sweat and Rotgut, as the men called him. But off the field, he could be as shrewd and charming as he could be tough when on it. He read Cosgrave's face at a glance.

"I see you don't like it," he said bluntly. "Mr. Lundgren said you wouldn't. Well, if you prefer, I'll withdraw my request. Of course it's entirely unofficial, as you're not under my command, and I can appreciate your feelings."

Cosgrave thawed instantly. He pulled out a chair for the visitor.

"I trust I'm not so ungracious, sir. It'll take us a few minutes to get the set-up in shape—"

"I'll do that," Lundgren volunteered. "You tell the General our purpose."

Cosgrave relaxed. The General gave him a rueful smile.

"Don't make it technical, Professor; it'd be over my head! I understand that you're working with the general principles of radar—short waves that bounce back from any obstacle and give its position and location."

Cosgrave shook his head.

"We're working with different waves. Shorter, more powerful, of infinitely higher frequency, of speed even greater than that of light—far beyond," he rejoined. "Instead of reaching solid obstacles, we want to reach immaterial ones such as fog, cloud or even other waves. Look—if we could reach out and block or confuse the enemy's radar, just as a radio broadcast can be jammed—you see the point?"

"Gad, yes!" exclaimed the General. "And can you do it?"

"No. Nor can we give you the precise nature of the weather over the enemy territory. But we've learned that such ideas are feasible. Give us time, and we'll succeed. We're using electronic tubes of special glass, for example. Our quartz crystals, instead of being the usual twelve-thousandths of an inch thick, vary in size. We've struck no end of surprising things that may have their uses; but the most amazing, and the least expected, was this experiment."

He motioned toward Lundgren, who was busy at the panels and switches, changing tubes.

"I heard rumors of it," said the General. "Just what is it?"

Cosgrave smiled. "I wish we knew, sir! We were attempting to activate and record whatever extraneous frequencies might lie in the far ether; we got something we can neither explain nor understand—voices, scenes, actual happenings!"

The voice of Lundgren broke in.

"All set! John, you take over the dials and try to get a steady current. —General, we guarantee nothing—but we're on our way!"

He threw a switch. . . . Nothing happened.

Cosgrave adjusted current and frequencies; the micro-sensitive dials were tricky things. The huge screen that occupied one whole side of the cabin, remained blank.

"No oscillations are registering," said Cosgrave.

"There were none the other time,"

Lundgren commented. "Those tubes warm up slowly. . . . Ah, there's the spark now!"

Across one of the panels leaped and quivered a long bluish spark. Almost at once portions of the screen showed a glow of radiance; Cosgrave found himself watching it with his nerves taut; anything might happen. Angri-ly he ordered himself to quiet down.

"Hell's bells! What's that?" barked the General suddenly.

His voice was startled, and no wonder. For an instant the huge screen



"I want my ship back," said Ranger, and I mean to have her." A smile touched Nelson's lips. "I

came alive with color and figures. It was only a flash that came and died away; but Cosgrave glimpsed a ship with tall naked spars rocking against the sky, and behind it a city.

"Why, that's Naples!" he exclaimed as the screen went dark.

"Looked like it, sure enough," Lundgren assented.

"You mean we're seeing that far ahead?" queried the visitor.

"General, you know just as much about it as we do," Cosgrave said desperately. "I don't think it was a view of Naples as it is; more likely, Naples of some past day."

He applied himself to the controls, tuning in frequencies, changing the current. A glow of color spread across the screen, but spottily, in blobs of variant hues. These took form by degrees—blue sky and a drift of clouds, a smoking cone that was obviously

Vesuvius. A feeling of space and distance registered. Close at hand the colors became flowers, a garden seat beside a fountain dripping water.

"EGAD, no!" exclaimed a high-pitched voice. "This is war, sir, war! I seized your ship because I have need of her. Take your complaints to the devil, and don't bother me again!"

The speaker took shape. He was a small, slender man, a black patch over his right eye. His empty right sleeve was pinned across the breast of his uniform jacket. Cosgrave turned, but his hand struck the dials. With a hiss and rattle of static, the whole thing faded away and the screen was blank again.

"Confound it! I jostled the controls—"

"John! For gosh sake, watch it!" implored Lundgren excitedly. "Know

who that man was? *Nelson!* Horatio Nelson himself! He was stationed in Naples a long time, you know. It was his headquarters while he was jockeying around with Napoleon's fleet, and even after he had wiped it out at the Nile. The King of Naples was England's ally then—"

"Right you are!" cried the General. "In love with another chap's wife, wasn't he? The books say there was a terrific scandal. He was a grand naval officer in some ways, poor in others; and off his quarterdeck he was by all accounts a queer fish. By the way, I suppose you chaps know where we're heading for?"

Cosgrave, working at the dials, glanced up.

"No. We've heard rumors, nothing else. Naples, I thought."

"Salerno, just south of Naples," said the General. "Safe enough to tell you,



want your ship, and I have her!"

but don't pass it on. We may not make it; the Nazis are there in force, we hear. It won't be a walkover. Until we can get an air umbrella at work, we'll have a tough job. . . . Hello! Here it comes again."

THE screen clouded with colors again. The smoking cone of Vesuvius took shape, but now it stood out from a different angle. Enormous pediments of temple ruins appeared; two comfortable carriages stood beside them, the tethered horses grazing. "I know that place—I've been there!" said Lundgren breathlessly. "It's Pæstum—the Greek temple ruins just south of Salerno, a favorite excursion from Naples! From there to Salerno and Naples is said to be the most beautiful strip of coast in the world."

The coastline unfolded to view; the screen vanished. The blue sky and

sea, the ancient marble columns, the flowers and long surf-edged slopes, assumed glowing beauty. It was not a picture, for it took on depth and all dimensions—it was like looking through an open window at the scene.

Just within the ruined portico of the sea-god's temple, servants were opening baskets and spreading linens, preparing food and wine for the three people who had journeyed here to visit the Grecian ruins. One was a white-haired man, hale and hearty and beaming, busily copying an inscription from a pediment; Sir William Hamilton, British envoy at the court of Naples, was an enthusiastic delver in archaeology. His wife Emma, who might have been his granddaughter from her look of blooming youth, was busily scraping moss from the inscription for him, while Nelson looked on.

A strange, pitiful figure, this maimed seaman who had destroyed Napoleon's whole fleet at the Nile and was England's pride. He looked a sick man, and was; a hacking cough racked his frail body from time to time. Since entering the Royal Navy as a captain's servant at the age of twelve, a nervous, sickly boy, his life had been a constant battle against custom, law and regulation; when his body failed him, his strong spirit fought on. Feared and hated bitterly in many quarters, loved and admired in a few, he was a man of great abilities whose almost incredible failings had thus far been counterbalanced by his achievements. Now Lord Nelson, victor of the Nile, he dawdled away his time at Naples as the guest of Sir William, calmly ignoring the frantic orders of the Admiralty.

"What a happy thought was this excursion, Sir William!" he said, with a sigh. "It's like a dream to be here at peace, away from the yelling tumult of the court at Naples, away from dispatches and war and revolution, and the thunder of cannon!"

"Aye, my lord; this is a sweet spot," said the diplomat. "How I came to miss this inscription in previous visits, I can't say. Emmy, my dear, thanks. I have it now."

One of the servants spoke, and Sir William replied in fluent Italian. His wife met the look of the shrunken little man, and colored slightly; his face, with its high thin nose and pleasant mouth and firm chin, expressed his thoughts all too clearly. She tried to make light of the moment.

"I'm hungry as a wolf!" she cried. "It's glorious to be alone with the Greek gods and the victor of the Nile! What was it that Shakespeare wrote of such a time?"

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear," said Sir William, and winked at Nelson. "Are you sure you ought to repeat it?"

Nelson laughed. "Lady Hamilton, is all goodness and beauty; she could repeat anything and make it angelic!"

Lady Hamilton, whose beauty was greater than her tact, curtsied smilingly and found her quotation, and rattled it off charmingly:

*Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front;
And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds*

*To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.*

IT was a frightful, an incredible blunder, because it was true. Poor Emma perceived it herself, too late, and broke off in confusion; but Sir William, laughing, pinched her pretty ear. Everything she said and did delighted him.

"Why, not so amiss!" said he. "God knows our good friend has seen enough battle to do anyone a lifetime! I'd like to keep him at the Embassy indefinitely. Come along, let's to table. I'd like your opinion of the wine, my lord. It's some the King of Naples sent me."

They settled on cushions about the bountiful repast, Emma watching Nelson with adoring gaze, for he fascinated her, and Sir William running on with classical allusions and gay anecdotes. They laughed, chatted, ate and drank, while the servants sang to a guitar and the horses grazed contentedly, and momentarily all the world's bustle was forgotten.

But the world, their own little world of the Kingdom of Naples, was breaking up around them. Nelson knew it, even if Sir William, who had been ambassador here for thirty years, was blind to it. It was coming, and coming fast, at this end of the year 1798.

Fat, rapacious King Ferdinand—King Bignose, they called him—was not loved. His Queen Caroline, a sister of Marie Antoinette, was capable but also unloved. The French armies were drawing near; Naples was to become a republic. King Bignose had sent forth his army to scatter the French as Horatio Nelson had scattered their fleet—and Sir William had chosen this moment to seek inscriptions at Pæstum!

"Who," asked the diplomat abruptly, as they sampled the wine, "was that American feller who was pestering you at Naples, my lord?"

"Eh?" Nelson's eye left the rose-petal features of Emma. "Oh! Ranger, his name was. That's his ship lying in the harbor. Rather, it was his ship. I've taken her over."

"Of course, of course; I remember now. The fellow sent me a deuced long memorial about it. Act of war he said. You had some reason, of course?"

"The best of reasons. We may need her. I've got only the *Vanguard* and the *Alcmene* there at the moment."

"Upon my word!" Sir William stared at this cool statement. "But that is an act of war! What am I going to say about it?"

"Say nothing. I may need that ship."

"I'm sure, my dear," put in Emma, "that whatever our dear admiral does, is done for the best."

"Aye, but it's demmed irregular!" said Sir William.

NELSON laughed. "Right you are, sir; so are the times. The whole world's irregular these days. You asked me to ship abroad all your packing cases—your marble statues, your Roman relics excavated at Pompeii, your silver and rugs and so forth. Well, sir, they're aboard that American ship now, and she'll take them to Barcelona, from where they'll go to England."

"Why, then, damme but we should have chartered the ship!" said Sir William, whose wealth made money no object.

Nelson nodded, his one eye vivacious.

"I tried; the fellow refused. So I took her."

"Perhaps I had better read his demmed memorial," said the diplomat uneasily.

"Better wait and see if the French reach Naples," said Nelson. "If they do, nothing will matter. I've promised the Queen, by the way, that if the worst happens I'll embark the Royal Family for Sicily."

"Absolute nonsense, my dear fellow," said Sir William testily. "The French will be scattered like a covey of partridge, take my word for it! Come, join me in another cup of this wine; it's really excellent! Not even the Falernian can compare with it. . . ."

He rambled on. Nelson met the eye of Emma, and shrugged lightly, and smiled. When he smiled, his face lit up and one forgot his vanished eye and empty sleeve. There was a charm about the man. It rarely showed, because he was a martinet, a Royal Navy man; and a man of the Royal Navy was second to nothing in the world except God, and there was some doubt even as to this exception. . . .

The *clop-clop-clop* of shod hooves at gallop came from the road; the servants gave tongue; a man, a foreigner, they cried in Italian.

"Your pardon," said Ranger. He appeared suddenly before them, standing on the temple steps, doffing his dusty hat. He was sunburned and stood like a seaman, feet apart, a trifle round in the shoulder; his features were well balanced, hard, a bit humorous.

"Forgive the intrusion," he went on, "but I seek Admiral Nelson. I have news of the greatest importance, for his ear alone."

"Oh, it's you again," said Nelson, with all the arrogance of the Navy. "Well, Mr. Ranger, I have no secrets from Sir William and Lady Hamilton."

Ranger bowed. "Most regretfully, I have," he said pleasantly. "In fact,

my lord, I have come to barter my news for ten minutes of your time, in private."

The words were like an itch to Nelson. News, great news, might come from a dozen directions—news of the French armies, news of Napoleon, news of the fleet, news from London. Nelson's eye glittered with anger; but after all it was a good eye. The little admiral could recognize a crisis or a man at a glance.

He rose, excused himself to his hosts, and came to Ranger. The sleeve pinned across his white waistcoat jerked; his fin was flapping, as his crew was wont to say—a sign of anger and excitement.

THEY stepped outside together. Nelson eyed the dusty clothes.

"You've ridden hard," he said, as they walked along the temple pediment.

"I killed a horse reaching Salerno, and got a fresh mount there. A courier is on the way, I think, and it was necessary to get here first."

"Very well. Let's have it."

"The French have taken Rome and are pressing on. The entire Neapolitan army has fled, abandoning camp, weapons, everything, without a battle," said Ranger. "The French may be kept from reaching Naples for a few days; that's all. The city's in wild panic and all the ships in the harbor except yours—and mine—have put to sea."

So the worst had happened!

Nelson stood looking out at the sea. He knew what this meant; a mad rush of return to Naples, conferences with



the futile, cowardly Bignose and the able, intriguing queen; advice with Sir William and the Austrian ambassador—talk, talk, talk until the French were at the very gates of Naples. And then wild scrambling flight to get aboard ship if they could. A doubtful matter; the populace and the French both wanted to get their hands on King Bignose, for his many rascalities and cruelties.

Nelson turned. "Is that all your news? Then—what else do you want?"

"I want my ship back," said Ranger, quietly, firmly. "I've been at sea since I was fourteen. I've worked my way upward from cabin-boy to master. More, I'm chief owner. I want that ship, and I mean to have her."

A smile, shadowy but real, touched Nelson's lips.

"I've been at sea since I was twelve," he said. "I've worked my way up from captain's servant to admiral. I want your ship, and I have her!"

Ranger broke into a laugh at the mimicry, then sobered.

"Very well, sir; but it's no jest. You committed an act of war against the United States when you seized that ship."

"I've done it before," said Nelson, with perfect truth. "Then it was four ships, not one, and the war did not come. Here, let's get out of the sun and into the breeze."

They went on into the shade of the columns. Nelson slipped his arm in

that of the American; he abandoned his *brusquerie* and became warm, intimate, charming.

"You're a seaman; now let a seaman speak," he said. "Like an army of starved locusts, the French have looted Venice and all northern Italy. I'm here with two ships of war. You say all others have fled from Naples. Here, then, is my problem."

HE spoke as though to some comrade. He had the gift of winning men's hearts when not too arrogant to exercise it; there was actually appeal in his voice.

"I've known this was coming. My task is to embark the Royal Family to safety; and with them, their treasures, which amount to millions of pounds sterling. Further, to embark His Majesty's Ambassador and family and goods. In short, I must cheat the French of their prey. But before I can do it, I must chitchat and argybargy with King Bignose and a pack of cowards—and farther, I must get the King and Queen safely away from their own people. Well, that's why I took your vessel. I needed her. You'll get her back; Sir William, indeed, will pay you excellent charter money to Barcelona."

"It's the principle of the thing," began Ranger.

Nelson snorted. "Principle be damned! This is war, panic, disaster. I do as I see best."

"I might say the same," said Ranger. "There are people in Naples who want to establish a republic, with French backing. I'm an American. They've been after me to lead them. I could do it, and do it well; in fact, I could make Naples hell for you!"

Nelson looked down his hooked nose at the man, for a long moment.

"The King would have you shot for those words."

"King Bignose will be lucky if he's not guillotined, as you well know."

Nelson's lips twitched. "Suppose, my friend, that we both yield a point. When the moment comes, I'll embark the Royal Family to Palermo; I need your vessel for cargo space. I'll not trust you aboard her, either. So I'll embark you as well. At Palermo, you'll get your ship back, on one condition."

The vision of his ship laden with the treasure of Naples made Ranger's eyes bulge.

"Name it," he said.

"There's not one soul in this damned treacherous, cowardly court whom I can trust. Our danger is not from the French, but from the populace—fickle, deceptive, vice-ridden. Sir William is able, but old; he's giving signs of breaking under this strain. Very well, sir. My prize crew will take your vessel to Palermo, I'll take you—provided you keep me advised of movements in the city, of danger and when it will come."

Nelson's dark-lantern guided them out into the bitter night air.





"The world is falling to pieces," said Pompilio. "It is time for every man to think of himself."

"A spy?"

"If you like the word," Nelson shrugged. "This is necessity. Take my offer or leave it, as you like."

The steely note was creeping back into his voice. Its peremptory warning gave Ranger pause; he thought fast. Thus far, he had done more than he had really anticipated, for his whole attitude was sheer bluff.

"Done with you," he said calmly. "But, if I may say so, I've had the devil's own time getting in touch with you, in the past. And if I'm to keep you informed—"

Nelson broke into a laugh. "Right. Your name shall reach me instantly upon application, my word upon it! Come to the Palazzo Sesso, the Embassy, you know, whenever you like. And now come and meet the Hamiltons, and get a bit of refreshment."

RANGER assented gladly. In the ruins of the temple, he was presented to Sir William and Emma, wine was poured for him, he was made to sit down and share the rich viands there spread out. Only then did Nelson impart to the others the terrible tidings—for they were, indeed, terrible to those ears.

Then, as though caught up in whirlwind, Lords and Lady and servants, horses and carriages, cushions and silver, all vanished hurly-burly, leaving wines and food and John Ranger of Boston town, and his jaded horse. Presently, bundling what was left of the food like a careful man, he mounted and started back to Salerno.

All the long way of return, first to Salerno, and on through the night to Naples, he rode, jaded and sore of body, but rejoiced of spirit. At least, he understood why his ship had been seized, why Nelson was grimly hanging on to it, and why he himself was not to be trusted aboard. Yes, the little admiral was dead right! With that vessel loaded down with millions and millions of treasure in dead secrecy—Ranger whistled to himself at the bare thought.

A spy—well, he might be worse off! He would act the spy, or anything else, to get his ship and cargo back. The one great worry now in his mind was about his crew. He had been able to hear nothing from them since his ship had been seized. His fear was lest they had been impressed to serve aboard the British ships and entirely replaced by Royal Navy men. In that case, he had seen the last of them; he might get his ship back, but no crew. Clever little admiral, eh?

On regaining Naples he slept for a full day, and walked stiffly for a long while. But the drums of destiny were rolling; from an unsuspected quarter, his big moment was at hand.

This, the noisiest and most vicious city of Europe was in the wildest imaginable turmoil. The Royal Palace adjoined the Castle, the Arsenal and its tiny harbor of the Darsena, with ancient palaces of the nobility lying all about. It was constantly besieged by armed mobs. Now they wanted a glimpse of the King and Queen, now they yelled braggadocio defiance of

the French, now they were howling for a republic. Anyone who crossed their evil fancy was torn to pieces. Blood flowed daily in the gutters; crime was rampant.

FRENCH agents were at work, half the nobles and popular leaders were in correspondence with the enemy. Treachery and panic were everywhere. In the palace itself, terror and cowardice reigned supreme. The French were certainly approaching, though not rapidly; every courier, every new tumult in the city, sent shudders through the palace. Day and night mobs thronged the streets. The Royal Family were prisoners of the people, and the guns of the Castle were ready to blow Nelson's ships out of the water.

The only persons who kept their heads were Nelson and the Hamiltons, who had moved into the palace; upon them the unhappy, futile Bourbons depended absolutely. The King's enormous treasure of gold and jewels, said to be the greatest in Europe, was being packed for shipment; the task was slow and difficult.

Amid this welter, John Ranger moved serene. Ever since the seizure of his ship he had been under surveillance, for the city was filled with secret police. He had even become on speaking terms with one or two of these sinister figures. Now one of them sought him out, stamping up to his rented room and saluting him obsequiously. It was Pompilio, an intelligent rascal with huge mustache, huge tricorne hat, and voluminous cloak.

"Excelentissimo signor, I bring you good news!" said he. "By special order, you are no longer watched by the police. I congratulate you, Signor Americano!"

Ranger sniffed more to come. "Thanks, Pompilio. A glass of wine? A chair?"

Pompilio straddled a chair and puffed out his cheeks.

"The English are your enemies, excellency; they seized your ship. Well, the world is falling to pieces around us; the French will be here in a few days. It is time for every man to think of himself, eh? You are an American, therefore I can trust you."

"Prove it," said Ranger. "Find out what has become of my crew!"

Pompilio twirled his big mustache and grinned. His evil little black eyes glinted.

"They were all sent aboard the big English ship last week, excellency, like sheep. Two of three were bandaged. I saw it done. I watch everything, from the quays. The English mean to embark King Bignose and his wealth, and run away. Everybody talks of it, everyone is watching

for it; I alone know the secret. And though I love you as a brother, excellency, I sha'n't tell you that secret—just yet."

Lifting over the city came the roaring of the mob, at its daily sport—the King and Queen had to show themselves at a palace window to their howling subjects. Pompilio hitched his chair closer and spoke quietly.

"Excellency, you and I together can gain great wealth. The mob has formed a fine plot, with the soldiery in the Castle. At any sign of evacuation by the King and the English, the big guns in the Castle will open fire on the palace and on the English ships. Watchers are posted in all the streets, signals are arranged, all is set. Then the mob moves in upon the palace, the soldiers join them, and the looting begins. But I have a better plan!"

He laid a forefinger along his nose and winked.

"That is," he added, "if your excellency seeks wealth, and will aid me."

"Loot? I'd like nothing better!" said Ranger promptly. "How can I help you?"

"Nobody in the palace is trusted any more. I can learn nothing," Pom-

pilio said sadly. "I watch, I listen; I have good men, the best cutthroats in Naples. Very late some nights, boats come in to the Victoria mole, named for the great victory of the Nile, and then into the Darsena, the little harbor under the Arsenal walls. Nobody sees them, but I see them. They take out the treasure, you understand? Not every night, just some certain nights."

THE American started slightly. Was Nelson putting that fabulous hoard aboard ship by night?

"But it could not go through the streets! The watchers would know!" he said.

"Precisely. There is a better way; I, Pompilio, alone know of it. *Ecco!* Go to the palace and find out when the next shipment goes aboard; I must know when, in advance. Then all will be ready. We seize it and go down the coast. We are rich men."

Ranger nodded. Treasure, boxes going aboard each night—such wealth that a mere fraction of it would set up John Ranger for life and compensate the loss of his ship!

The thought fired him. King Big-nose had looted his subjects for years.

"Good! I'm with you," he said, putting scruple aside in the heat of the moment. "But how can it be sent to the boats?"

Pompilio winked again. "I'll tell you that when you tell me when, excellency."

"Done with you. Meet me at six tomorrow evening at the tavern behind San Giovanni Maggiore, and I'll have the information."

Ranger walked the quays that afternoon in a blaze of impatient joy and eagerness. The city streets ran down to the water in landing-stairs and wharves; at night, the feeble lights pierced the gloom not at all—yes, it could be done, provided the stuff were got to the waterside from the palace. There lay the rub, with bonfires burning in the streets of night and the mob on watch!

He went to the Royal Palace and asked for Nelson, giving his name. Sure enough, it gained him prompt admittance. The admiral was busy; he must wait his turn in the gardens. The whole place was in uproar and confusion.

There Lady Hamilton came past and saw him, and gave him her hand



in glad recognition. She led him to a marble seat overlaid with cushions, for the weather had turned bitter cold. She looked pale and worn; she had not had her clothes off for days, she said. Every moment brought fresh alarms. Lord Nelson was with the Queen this minute; he would soon be free.

Glad of momentary respite, she chatted freely. Even in this weary time, she had the charming abandon of a child. Lackies and court functionaries came with questions and problems, since all the cares of the terrorized household had devolved on her. She gave quick, capable orders and went on with her talk; it was pleasant to converse with a friend of the admiral, for so she took Ranger to be.

"Oh, la! Up until the dawn nigh every night, and half the cooks run off—why, it's preposterous!" she said. "But only another day or two; and we've really got everything off safely. The poor dear admiral is nigh worked to death!"

"I wish you could persuade him to release the crew of my ship," said Ranger, and told her of his men's plight.

"Indeed I'll speak to him about it," she promised, and rose. "Wait here, and I'll see that you're summoned the instant he's free."

Ranger waited. Everything off safely—then, was the treasure already gone, was that fabulous hoard really shipped? It seemed impossible. Presently a lackey came to summon him.

IN an enormous palace room the little maimed figure was pacing back and forth among staff and secretaries and interpreters. At sight of Ranger he broke away, joined the American, and took him beyond earshot of the others.

"Well, sir? Is there any definite threat from the city mob?"

"Most definite, my lord; two threats, in fact," said Ranger dryly. "Mob leaders and soldiery in the Castle are in accord; the Castle guns are trained on your ships."

"And my guns are trained on the Castle."

"But yours cannot be elevated sufficiently to command it. The scheme is to open fire at the first move to embark the King—to fire on your ships and on the palace. They're determined that the King and Queen shan't leave; better, they say, to destroy everything and let in the mob to kill and loot. A number of nobles are in the plot, and French agents are stirring things to a boil."

"Hm!" Nelson seemed unimpressed by the peril. "And what's the second threat?"

"Me," said Ranger, quite unworried by grammar.

"You? A threat?"

"Possibly. I understand that my crew has been pressed into Navy service aboard your ships. I'd like 'em put back aboard my own ship."

Nelson's face went bitter hard on the instant.

"Giving me orders, are you? Damn your impudence! I've put your lazy dogs to work, and I'll keep 'em at work. We need men. I bargained with you for the ship, not the crew."

Ranger nodded. "Quite right, so you did. That was my mistake."

"Then swallow it. And by the way, I want you here at the palace at eight tomorrow night—eight o'clock, six bells, d'ye mind? It's demmed important; don't fail."

Ranger bowed slightly. "Very well. Meantime, about my crew; I feel responsible for those men. They're all New Englanders, Americans. I feel the same responsibility for them that you, no doubt, feel for the royal treasures and their secret disposal aboard ship."

Nelson froze, becoming absolutely motionless. The shaft had reached its mark.

"So it *was* a threat!" he said quietly.

"What do you know?"

"Everything," said Ranger, bluffing with smiling assurance. "My men must be given their freedom—"

"Cozen me, will you? Give me orders—*me!* Damme to hell and sink me lower!" burst out Nelson furiously. "You upstart rascal, I'll see you hanged to your own yardarm first! You made a bargain; keep it. Give me any threats, and I'll have you shot! I've a mind to do it anyhow—"

No idle peril; a good deal of shooting and hanging was taking place, in the background. But just then came a man running with word that the Austrian Embassy was being sacked by the mob, and the Ambassador had come to the palace seeking safety. With a curt order that Ranger be here at eight the following night, Nelson turned away.

Failure, failure on all counts—even the hoard of millions had gone, and the dream of loot was shattered, Ranger went away in evil humor.

It was bitter cold that evening. He walked the streets late, drank more than was good for him, loafed about the quays. No boats came in this night, but he could see with half an eye how easily they might come, if expertly handled; the shivering sentries huddled out of the wind, and any pretense at watch was a farce. But the mob burned its fires and kept its men in the streets—King Bignose was not to escape from their hands! Thirty thousand men were up in arms that night.

The next day dragged. News and rumor and wild reports were mingled:

the French were pressing on, and the last remnants of any opposition had vanished.

An unhappy day for Ranger. He had already provided himself with a brace of pistols, and during the morning he acquired a heavy loaded stick. Revolution was in the air; the streets were riotous; the lower elements of the mob were in control, and unless the French came quickly, there would be fire and loot and pillage uncontrolled, not to mention murder. But the French were coming, and coming fast.

Putting one thing with another, Ranger could guess why he was to be at the palace at eight that evening. Nelson was keeping his pledged word to take Ranger to Palermo. Tonight the Royal Family would be put aboard ship—but how? There would be no passage through the streets. Close as the palace lay to the water, nothing short of an army could procure safety for King Bignose and his family.

AT dark, Ranger sought the tavern behind San Giovanni, where the food was good. He must finish with Pompilio, get rid of him, and be off to the palace by eight.

Pompilio was in high good humor. He embraced Ranger, swore lustily, ordered a big meal and good wine, tapped weapons peeping out from under his cloak, and hinted at mystery and grandeur. The American concluded he might as well break Pompilio's bubble.

"Well, I got the information we wanted," he said. "There's bad news, Pompilio. Most of the treasure has gone aboard the ships. How, I don't know; but it's gone."

"I expected that," said Pompilio. "No matter, excellency; some will remain, and in any case, look at this." He cautiously displayed a huge roll of money. "Half of this goes to you—not here, but later. And enough treasure will remain to make us rich. You have learned, you say, when the boats will come in?"

"Tomorrow night," said Ranger. Pompilio grinned.

"Excellency, you wonder why I do not regret the loss of the treasure? Well, as I say, enough will remain; King Bignose will have his best jewels in his pockets. All these will go to us. I had a long talk today with Bonaparte's chief agent here in the city; a slight change in arrangements. I did not tell him my secret; but I made a bargain with him."

"Your secret? You mean, how the stuff was got out of the palace?"

"And how King Bignose will get out of the palace—precisely!" Pompilio winked. "No talking here. I'll show you, as soon as we've dined. I trust nobody; but I trust you, *exce-*

lentissimo! Tomorrow night, you say? Good, good! The Frenchman said it would be either tonight or tomorrow night. Well, I have guaranteed that we catch King Bignose and all his family, and those with him—all of them! You shall see the English admiral at your mercy."

"Catch them?" repeated Ranger.

"Exactly. Like fish in a net. The Frenchman will be waiting to clap them all into cells. Oh, I'll show you, my friend! You'll understand everything. Now let us eat."

They ate. Ranger's thoughts were in tumult; he had not bargained for this. Grabbing the loot was one thing, but seeing them all clapped in cells, betrayed to sure murder, was a vastly different thing. Nelson, the King, the Queen and her children, Emma Hamilton. . . . Thank heaven he had lied about the time! This Pompilio was a very devil incarnate.

But what was the secret—the boasted secret? Pompilio was exultant over it. He had not imparted it to the Frenchman; he would impart it to no one except Ranger; and only to him on the spot, said he. The meal over, the wine finished, they started back from San Giovanni toward the quays, Pompilio strutting famously. Darkness had descended by now.

The church clocks were striking half after seven when they came under the castle walls, passing the shore end of the mole and picking their way toward the little Darsena harbor by the Arsenal. The waterfront was deserted; it was bitter cold; no stars showed; the night was dense. At the edge of the Arsenal quay, Pompilio halted and chuckled.

"My men are posted and awake—you'd not dream it, eh? I know how to post men. Well, excellency, the time is come; now for the secret! It is only a little way from here to the Arsenal walls, you see?"

"I realize, at least," said Ranger, looking at the dark bulk of the structure.

"When I was younger, I was the personal servant of King Bignose. And once, when he was drunk, he talked; he revealed the secret known to no one else! A way of escape from the palace, an underground passage from the palace grounds. It comes out here—here!"

There it was—everything explained in a word. Thus had come the treasure; thus would come Nelson and the palace occupants. Ranger drew a deep breath. Eight o'clock at the palace? Time was short.

"Here is your share of the money," went on Pompilio.

"Keep it. I don't want it," snapped Ranger unwisely.

"*Per Bacco!* Not want it? But it's good money, honest money—"

"Blood money," said Ranger. "No. Plunder was all right; murder is not. I'll have none of it, Pompilio. Go your way. I'll say nothing of it. Tomorrow night—"

"One moment, excellency. Tomorrow is another time. This is tonight." The harsh voice deepened. A shrill whistle came from Pompilio—a signal. "You, whom I trusted, would betray me!"

"I'll betray you not," said Ranger impatiently, conscious now of his error.

"That's the truth. So you don't want to see them cut off here, eh? You were merely playing with old Pompilio! Well, by the saints! Here, comrades! To me, to me!"

The dark figure moved. Before Ranger knew what was happening, he felt a shock and the bite of steel. Ripping out furious curses, Pompilio was upon him, striking again—a long stiletto reaching for his life. Shadows were closing around, voices ringing. . . .

Desperate, stabbed, feeling his own warm blood inside his shirt, Ranger leaped aside. No time now to prime pistols! His heavy stick whirled; they were all around him, darting in at him. He struck, lashing out full force for very life. The loaded cudgel thudded, slashed home. Cries leaped up. Two figures came in at him together, and again he felt steel bite; the pain maddened him. He struck out in frantic fury. The heavy stick smashed home repeatedly; screams rang out. Another smash, another scream cut short midway as the hurt man went over into the water. That was Pompilio. A burst of frightened voices, and the others scattered and were gone like shadows upon the night.

WALKING slowly and painfully, John Ranger came to the palace entrance, passed in under the lanterns, and his name got him admittance. The first person he saw was Nelson, cloaked and hatted. The little admiral came up to him eagerly.

"Ranger? Good, very good. By the way, I've news for you: Lady Hamilton has spoken to me about that crew of yours; egad, I can refuse her nothing, nothing! You shall have your ship at Palermo as I agreed, and your crew with it, my word upon it. . . . Here! What's wrong, man? Hurt?"

"Apparently," said Ranger, pressing hand to side. "I thank you, sir—and you'd best get away quickly. One man, at least, knew of that secret passage. He won't talk now; but those damned stilettos—"

Men crowded around, caught him as he staggered, and stripped him to the waist. Three slashes, two of them nasty wounds; before he knew it, bandages were being clapped on and

compresses laid in place by Emma Hamilton's deft hands.

Nelson, the King, the Austrian Ambassador, Sir William, the royal children—no others. Ten in all, here by the lanternlight.

The rest was like a dream. Nelson's dark-lantern guided them by the dripping passage. They came out into the bitter night air under the dark Arsenal walls. On across the quay to the landing-stairs. A dark shape rocked there in the water.

"Bad weather outside, my lord," said a voice. "A big storm's blowing up!"

"Be damned to it!" said the little admiral. "Hello, what is all of this?"

A pale shaft from his dark-lantern struck down at the water. Ranger's eyes followed the ray; for an instant, the face of Pompilio looked up at him—eyes staring, huge mustaches awash—a face of death.

"I don't know, sir," came the reply. "There was some sort of scrimmage going on here just a while before we tied up."

"Never mind. Aboard, everybody!" snapped Nelson.

John Ranger, helping a queen to herd her frightened children into the boat, laughed softly to himself as a howl of wintry wind swept in from the sea to girdle the walls of the high castle.

He laughed, despite his hurts. He could afford to laugh, for after all, the joke was on Pompilio—a ghastly joke on the rascal who had so closely guarded his secret that now it would be told too late.

Another boat was at hand, and another; and the stormy blast howled sea-greeting to the little admiral—who, like England, expected every man to do his duty, and was not disappointed. . . .

In the big cabin-laboratory atop the *Craesus*, heading for Salerno and Naples, the screen went blank. Cosgrave was about to speak when he was interrupted; the communications loudspeaker blazed in upon the silence.

"Stand by, stand by! An important message."

Static blared and rasped. What came next was lost. But the General leaped to his feet with a cry.

"Why, that's General Eisenhower's voice!"

So it was; Cosgrave tensed, trying to make out the words. They would not come clear. The static was terrific. Suddenly one sentence rang out to every ear—one sentence that made each one of them jump.

"—that Italy has surrendered."

Another story in this counterclockwise series following the American invasion of Europe will appear in our next issue.

ATTACHED to their shafts, the spurs had small balls of silver which rang as Michael walked or rode. They rang a little, even when he rode slowly. He missed their ringing on this slow ride down Long Valley against a fine rain.

Mike's horse was keen for the valley's end; he had friends yonder. He couldn't understand his rider's hard restraint. A hundred times he had pelted down the narrowing country with a loose rein and the jingle of spurs. Both horse and rider missed the music. Mike was almost sorry he had given the spurs to Johnny as a gift of friendship. Johnny had observed: "When you find these spurs hanging from any place but my heels, you can know I've quit ridin' for swingin', Mike." And he'd laughed, grim and gay, knowing that his way of life on horse or foot might hoist him at any time to that uncomfortable eminence.

Instead of that, Michael was going first. Well, to be a friend of Johnny, man or woman, had always meant disaster. Laure was right. "A man that don't care to be true to himself, aint so likely to be true to other folks." She had said: "You're too dumb, Mike, for Red's game." He had given her a hard fixed grin. "Yes sir, I mean it. You're a good marryin' feller, honest and hard-working like your parents was. I'll wager they never did leave you a-purpose in that camp where Red Michael picked you up. Something came to them, drownin' or quicksand, so they never could get back. Like it or not, you got the eyes of a honest kid, Mike, even if Red did name you for himself. Your eyes and your grin talk louder than your braggin'. There aint a thing in your face that looks like stealin' or killin'. Rig yourself up in silver and what-not, you never look to me like a thing in the world but a good kid playin' the fool."

Fool he was. Wise, he'd have stuck to the receiving end of the game and never gone out as Red's agent and got him a job with the big Laing outfit and worked for wages. Better by a lot, if he'd never dropped into Bartow's place and met that Laure. Until then it had been a game, and he'd sure liked Red Michael and his gang. Their reasons for the life had sounded fine, and the life itself had seemed good—plenty of profit and not too much risk. Red had worked it out just dandy with his truck and his agents and all the rest of the high-powered modern cattle-stealing, butchering and selling game. The boy Michael had been taught Red's contempt for law and for law-abiding men.

Sundance nickered. That meant they were getting down to Laure's

Spurs



trail. He wished he didn't have to tell her.

Laure wouldn't make any fuss. She wasn't the fussing kind. Poor kid, her fate had been wished on her all-right when she'd been born to be Long Bartow's girl. And the way old Harvey had asked her to be his wife looked like the best luck that could ever come to Bartow's kid. So it had been settled—when up that trail had had to come riding Johnny and Michael, young and hard and smiling.

Up that trail Michael rode now with his chin on his chest. He'd ought to have let the girl alone.

She had heard his horse and met him at the first bars just across the ford. She came to his stirrup and laid her rough little hands about his boot.

"You ridin' slow, Mike. Somethin' wrong."

"Yes'm. Where can we talk?"

"In the old shack down yonder."

In that cabin it was almost dark. They sat on the pine-needled floor. Mike tried to tell her.

"We got away with the first haul."

"The first?" Her voice was scared, angry. "You never tried it twicet!"

"Johnny was set. He said Laing was the most sucker he'd ever cashed

by KATHARINE
NEWLIN BURT

The distinguished author of "A Man's Own Country" and "No Surrender" here gives us a fine drama of the West.

ing on. He figured Laing's outfit was good for a second haul."

Laure had turned her eyes away. Her face had a fashion of getting narrow when her color went. A sort of a little thin schoolmarm face—then sudden as light, beauty took after it. The eyelashes curled up, delicate and quick; you could feel, just with looking, the curling softness of her hair; that smile came flying and a pretty rose climbed up, softening and rounding the whole face. Kind of trick the sun plays on a pale winter valley.

"Laing was sure fine." Michael shifted his position as though in pain.

"What come to your promise, Mike? Oncet that first haul had come off and you'd kept your word to Red, you was sure quittin'."

"I sure meant it that way. I tried to talk Johnny round. But Laing's stock is sure fine and Red was proud of our first job. Johnny and me had the herd to ourselves to cut out the prime steers that easy and we got them down to the draw where Red had his truck and we butchered them. We come back to the ranch 'plumb tuckered out with lookin' for a couple strays.' Laing sure acted like he believed us. He sent us out ag'in alone

It would have fooled the devil the way he seemed to be trustin' us."

"And it was a trap?"

"Sure. And Johnny lost his head and shot one of the sheriff's men."

He felt her draw away from him.

"He got caught? You got off?"

"No ma'am. I was watchin' from above and, afore I knowed it, some fellers Laing had sent out, got me from behind. I seen the other bunch ridin' in on Johnny and I shot to warn him. Same time he fired, and the man in front of the rest pitched over."

"But how come you're with me now?" Her breath was laboring.



*Michael spoke.
"Wanted by the
Copper City
sheriff, Robert
Saul. Stick 'em
up!"*

*tellin' them 'twas you that squealed.
That way we both get off, and you
can quit the game like you was plan-
nin' to."*

Laure shivered.

"He got me fixed to break jail—
same guy that helped him—and I took
it. Found Sundance in a pasture."

"So—you came to me."

"I'm on my way down the valley to
Red's hole."

"You never!" She snatched at his
hand.

"Yes ma'am. Sheriff's after me. Get
me, I'll swing. There's a man killed.
Johnny's off. Some feller has got to
pay. I can't never prove it wasn't my
shot, not after Johnny's evidence.
Sure he put the whole thing on me.
Why not? He got me out of the pen,
saved me Sundance and the money I
got sewed into the saddle. Likely he
figured I'd beat it down to Bold
Mountain Country."

She whispered: "Why not?"

"I got to try to set me straight with
Red. It's my word ag'in' Johnny's.
And Red knows me well."

"The boys will never let you speak.
Johnny will have fixed them. It will
be shooting on sight. Johnny's warned
you. Likely he'll shoot you himself
so's you can't talk."

"They took the two of us down to
Copper City. They left me sittin' in
a room. There was a lot of pictures
there of Wanted Men. They took
Johnny out, and he didn't never come
back. About dawn, a guard handed
me a piece of writin' from Johnny.
He must have bribed him. That
writin' said: 'I'll get you out of this
or bust. Keep away from Red and
the boys. I've turned State's evidence.
I got me fixed right for a get-away,
and I'm beatin' it back to Red. I'm

Michael turned his splendid boy's
eyes to her. "I'd rather take Johnny's
bullet than live to be hunted by hon-
est men. And by my own gang too."

"What about—me?"

He caught her up, and the cabin
seemed to shake with the beating of
their hearts.

"When was to be your weddin' day
—to Harvey?"

"I been waitin'. I didn't dast tell
Pa about us."

"You marry him quick. Tomorrow,
Laure. And you—forget."

He pushed her from him and went
out into the driven mist. She stayed
against the old wall, her hands tight
by her sides, staring after him. He
whistled Sundance to him; the horse
would come for that whistle, tied or
no. He'd break a rope to come.

MICHAEL rode along the trail. It
closed in gray behind him. She
would be marrying the other man to-
morrow. It was the best she could do
for herself. And it wouldn't hurt
him—then.

It was a matter of forty miles now
to the rocky entrance of Lost Gorge,
beyond which he would not be al-
lowed to pass. And there remained
two affairs to be minded. There was
Tom Locker's place he'd meant to
buy. Locker was counting on that
sale. And there was Sundance.

It was noon and the rain was heav-
ier by the time he bent from his saddle
to lift the chain-loop from the posts
of Locker's gate.

From his porch the old man called
out: "Hi-yi! Come along in. I got
me some prime elk meat here."

Having greeted the little old man,
Michael went to the corral to care
for his horse and take out of his sad-
dle the wad of dingy bills. Three
hundred of it he returned to the
ripped seam—for luck. On his way
back to the cabin, he passed a fellow
with a cropped square head and a
sidelong stare. Michael thought he
had seen the dark face before.

Inside, he asked: "Where you pick
up your hired man, Mr. Locker?"

"He's a kind of starved maverick,
choppin' me my winter wood."

"Been here long?"

"Matter of five days."

"Always carry a gun?"

"He's a great hand at shootin' rab-
bits and sich."

"Mr. Locker, how soon you figure
you can turn out and leave me the
ranch here? I aim to get married and
settle here pronto. Tomorrow?"

The old man's face went pink.
"Sure suit me fine to pull out before
snow flies, had me the price of a trip
to Californy!"

Michael pulled out the roll of bills.

The hired man came in, muttered
a greeting, dropped an armful of wood

beside the stove and went to sit behind it.

Michael said: "I'll be back soon after you pull out, Mr. Locker. Just leave things like you would if you was goin' away fer a spell into the hills and ride on down with your two ponies. Leave them somewhere outside of Sandy Camp to pasture, where I can pick 'em up."

He finished eating and Locker pattered out to see him mount.

"Sure glad you're bringin' a woman here. Hope fer a coupla kids when I drap in on you. Don't fergit yer deeds, boy." He buckled them into Michael's saddle pocket and stood to watch him ride down the road. The big hired man had come out and slouched in the porch.

There was only one more stop. He'd leave Sundance with the prospector who was working Little Slide Creek. That feller was sure good to his horses. He came on the prospector's trail and turned the unwilling Sundance away from Lost Gorge. A short distance up, he unsaddled Sundance and hid all his trappings—man and horse—under a rock. He went afoot, leading the horse by the hackamore. Sundance, nervous and puzzled, came reluctantly.

The prospector met him in camp, coming up from the river in his wet boots, carrying his pan and his takings in a sack. He had long shrewd wrinkles about his eyes. He remembered Michael but without a smile.

"I got a horse I'd like to leave with you, Mister. I got to get me down-country a ways, on foot. Likely I'll be comin' back this way. If not, it will be account I won't be needin' Sundance any more."

"That sure is a fine animal. I reckon a man could sell him for good money."

"I don't want you should do that. I want him to have a good owner. I seen your ponies. They look good."

THEY were silent then, sitting opposite each other across the fire. The prospector had put his takings back of him and laid his gun absently across his knees.

"Well sir, I'll look after your hoss."

"I wouldn't be carin' to leave him without you can give me your word not to sell him."

"I won't sell him. If a feller comes a-lookin' fer a stolen horse—"

"He's my own."

"O. K. Nobody can prove nothin' on me anyhow. The horse strayed in. Got no saddle leather?"

"I rid me of the trappin's up-country."

"Did, eh?"

Michael stood up, said, "So long!" and swaggered down along the ridge and off to where the swamp land sur-

rendered to the forest. He kept himself from looking back. He heard Sundance whinny and he put his hands up like a kid's across his ears.

The trail was rough and steep and long. When night came, he sat down under a dense tent of fir and smoked his last makings. He waited for dawn.

When it came, he rose, tightened his belt, loosed his gun and went on down the trail. He narrowed his eyes, right, left, to sharpest vision. They'd have a sentry posted unless they'd pulled out, and it looked to be too soon for that.

He stopped hard on his step, jarring down on his boot-heels, staring, his mouth gone dry.

The cañon had narrowed almost to shoulder width. Its walls were sharp and tall against the green east.

Thrust out from that wall a branch clawed the sky. Hung from it, jingling in the dawn wind, was a pair of silver spurs. A paper was folded tight and buckled under the branch to keep dry.

"I don't need these no more," Johnny had scrawled in pencil, writing small. "I knowed you'd be fool enough to ride on down to meet the boys. There aint no need. Red aint so easy as the sheriff was. He's givin' you the benefit of the doubt and gettin' rid of me on general principles. I've sent a letter to the sheriff by a boy that will sure deliver it, tellin' him that one of his men can swear to me firin' the shot that did the killin'. I telled him you was sure a looker-on both times we made the haul. So get you back to Copper City and you'll



"What come to your promise, Mike?" Laure asked.

get off easy. Likely you'll settle down into one of these gol-derned homesteaders with a woman. Name the runt of yer litter fer me, Mike, if you want him to die young. —Johnny."

Johnny was dead. Michael was alive. He looked up, slow and dazed.

The sun struck glittering against the rocks. It was warm upon his living body. He could have leaped his own height toward the sun.

But as he turned, fear came upon him so tight, so cold that no death could equal it. He had rid himself of the trappings of life: his horse, his money and his girl. Laure was to be married today.

LEAVING the trail, he made a short cut over the high ridge. The sun had reached the prospector's camp when it opened below Michael's burning gaze. Already the man was up and had cleaned camp. He had two visitors. They stood in a knot in close discussion. His two ponies, one saddled, one packed, were ready for a move. Sundance blazed in a splendor of silver-studded harness. Bridled he was and saddled, and the chaps were slung across the horn. With his nose for hidden treasure, the prospector, suspicious of this naked horse and handsomely booted rider, had followed Michael's tracks, found the cache and rifled it.

Now Michael saw one of the men move over and feel those slender forelegs with his hands. And Michael knew. The prospector would sell this magnificently-appointed stray for good money and be rid of the dubious gift from a booted man who had set himself afoot.

Michael put his fingers to his lips. A whistle sprang through the air like an arrow. It pierced the opposite hills and echoed back. The prospector did not delay. He scrambled to his pony, mounted and galloped down the valley. Sundance flung up his head and reared. Twice he plunged and was free. He glittered through the glittering wet willows and took the steep slope Michaelward. Michael laughed to see the prospector taking to timber, while the men stared up and down. . . .

Sundance was beside him, breathing hard, a gentle nicker in his throat. Michael was crying. He got into his chaps, led the animal down to the trail level and fastened the silver spurs to his own heels.

"Now, son," he said with his cheek against the bright neck, "we'll make a ride for it."

To the rhythm of a gallop, to the jingle of spurs, his brain painted him pictures of yesterday. He saw Laure, as though he had knifed her to the wall. He saw old Locker, twinkling and happy, fingering his bills, saw

the hired man watching. Michael's living brain snapped out its information which, numbed by death, it had withheld. "Five Hundred Dollars Reward! Wanted for Robbery and Murder." The man had chopped off his hair and grown a stubble but there was no possible doubt. Michael had stared at that "wanted" face for all the long hours of a night. Robber and murderer—and the old man alone with cash in hand!

Michael abruptly pulled Sundance almost to his haunches. They had already passed the ford. They plunged back through the water, up the bank, down among the aspens and there, at the first fence, were Locker's two ponies, tied and ready.

Locker would not likely leave them here so far from his cabin. Nor would his canny fingers ever throw a crooked blanket or tie a clumsy bundle like that one! Michael undid the bundle. Some of the old man's clothes were in it and, knotted up in a bandana, stuffed into the pocket of a shirt, a roll of bills. Three hundred dollars. Around them an elastic band. Michael recognized it as his own. It had been broken and knotted. Yes, sir. The man was ready for his get-away. This was the money he'd taken from Michael's saddle while Michael was talking with Locker.

He came softly behind bushes to the gray house. Crouching below a sill, he saw Locker bent over a duffel-bag. The stray stood by the stove, his hand in his pocket. He just stood. He was waiting for the duffel to be packed—save him trouble afterward.

Thirty seconds later, from the threshold of the door, Michael spoke: "Wanted by the Copper City sheriff, Robert Saul, for robbery and murder. Stick 'em up!"

He heard Locker scuttle to his feet. "You sure got the wrong guy, Mister," Saul whined, as Michael took his gun.

"You, Mr. Locker," Michael advised without moving a muscle, "take your

duds down to the fence. You'll find your ponies waitin' there. This feller was all ready, just waitin' to pick up yer duffel and yer cash. Go on out, Mr. Locker, please, and carry this gun of his. It's good fer bigger game than rabbits. And make it snappy, will you please, sir—because I'm sure in a devil of a hurry. I'll take care of yer hired man. Plenty."

Locker's steps went scurrying down the trail.

"It aint fer me," said Michael slowly, his face red, "to hand a man over to the law. Five minutes I give you to get out of range. You better beat it south. You aint got no gun, and old Locker and me ride armed—and watchful!"

He stepped sidewise, leaving free passage to the door.

Ten minutes later with no sound of human motion in his ear, Michael thrust his gun back into its holster.

Now as he rode he had one thought within the anguished hurry of his mind. Men would have bad ridin' if they came back, helpless ghosts along the trails they make themselves toward death. Yes sir, a man has need to lay a careful course for a last journey—there might be broken horses, dead men and weeping women on the spirit trail that leads back.

OCTOBER, bright of sky and ground, flowed past him so that, very slow himself, he seemed to breast a rapid rainbow stream. His heart wove to and fro, needle-nimble, to Laure's wedding. She would marry the rich old rancher. What else was there for her to do—with him gone? But, at the entrance to Bartow's ranch, he stopped. The heart of him, pounding, had taken his breath, his strength. By sun time it was past noon. If they were to be married today, he sure had come too late.

He saw her through a mist of astonishment, coming slowly toward the gate. She had a bundle in her hand.

At his calling, she dropped what she carried, ran, was in his arms.

"You aint got killed!"

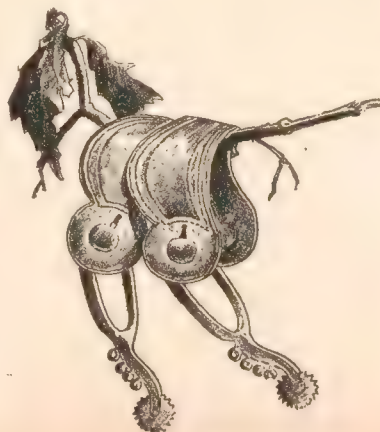
"You aint got married!"

"What you think, Michael? Would I likely marry any man but you? They treated me mean. I was makin' my get-away. I didn't care where to. I didn't care what fer. Only away."

She clung and sobbed. All her fatalistic control was broken. She was his girl—his little girl.

He lifted her into his saddle and tied her bundle with his own.

"Now, woman," said Michael, "I got to make Copper City afore all its parsons gits to bed. I aint a-goin' to pass the night in jail or out, without I got me a wife to call my own. So hold tight, you Laure Michael, for I aim to use my spurs."



What Do You Think?

A Readers' Forum

"My Brother Dick"

NEVER have I known a person with a greater sense of duty than my brother Dick. At home, if chairs were to be painted, woodwork scrubbed, or grass cut, he was the first to volunteer his service. When an errand had to be run, it was Dick who said, "I'll go, Mom." The week before every Christmas he would whisper to us youngsters that it was time to buy presents for the folks. And if anyone lay ill in the winter, he was always among the first to inquire: "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

In wartime he was the first of us to go off to the service. Bravely he elected training as a fighter pilot. Now he and his Spitfire machine are helping to protect England. He says that before a combat flight he is sometimes afraid, but that thoughts of his duty to the folks back home give him the courage and zeal to make a good record.

Do you know what I think of my brother? I think God will ever ride with him, and that God will not forget to give him once again the joy of spading the garden, picking the flowers, and trimming the hedge the way he always liked to do it.

Sgt. Mack H. Booze,
Gulfport Field, Mississippi.

"Pilot to Navigator"

WHAT do I think? I think of a voice over the interphone that asks:

"Pilot to navigator, pilot to navigator: Where are we; where are we?"

I'm the navigator. I'm the guy who sits up in the nose of the bomber and decides where the plane is, and how we're going to get to the objective and back home again.

It's not a glamorous job. Pilot, bombardier, gunners—they all have exciting tasks. They fly and bomb and kill, crossing swords with a visible enemy. But up in the nose sits the harassed navigator, pencil in hand, desk strewn with charts and mathematical tables, octant cradled between his feet, sweating blood and knowing that if he has made one false calculation, plotted in a wrong line, read a figure incorrectly, used a watch whose

MOST of us are interested to know how the other fellow looks upon or solves his personal dilemmas. And with this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. The author's full name and address must accompany the letter; but, if he prefers, initials only may be used for publication. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do You Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

time is half a minute off or computed a wind wrong, his plane, his crew and himself may be hopelessly lost.

Some of the navigators may not worry. Some of them may be sure they'll never make a fatal mistake; but me, I worry. Some of them may be sure they'll come out right, but I'm not hot rock. I'm a guy with average intelligence but no particular amount of mathematical ability who got through navigation school by working like a dog and being aided by three of the best instructors in the business. But now school is finished. I am for better or worse a navigator, and when the pilot starts asking questions, I'm the guy who has to answer him.

"Pilot to navigator, pilot to navigator: Where are we; where are we?"

Simply because we are navigators, I suppose, we may tend to over-emphasize the difficulties of our position. But we have had some practice in school; we have talked to some of the boys who have seen combat, and nothing that they say makes it seem any easier.

Navigation in the Aleutians, for instance. A long string of poorly charted volcanic peaks scattered through desolate seas up north where the weather is made. Flying eight or nine hundred miles to Paramoshiri often seeing nothing but the ocean all the way, dropping bombs, then flying home again. Flying in weather so thick that the objective is sometimes never seen, and bombs are dropped on the

navigator's E. T. A. (Estimated Time of Arrival) over the target. Navigating over craggy peaks plastered on whose sides one can see, during the infrequent clear days, the shattered skeletons of the Navy patrol bombers whose navigators miscalculated the altitude.

"Pilot to navigator, pilot to navigator: Where are we; where are we?"

Navigating in Africa where missions are planned to start early in the morning and end just after dusk so that the navigator will have fifteen minutes, fifteen whole minutes, to shoot a three-star fix, find out where he is, and bring his plane home.

Navigating in England where the use of radio, the easy means of locating your position, is proscribed. Flying a tortuous, ever-changing course to discourage the enemy's aircraft spotters. Flying in mass raids where the planes start out individually but must end up over the target within a half minute of each other.

Navigating in the Pacific for twelve hundred miles without seeing land to end up on a mere speck like Palmyra or Christmas Islands.

Of course, if thousands of other guys have done it there's no reason why I can't. But the difficulties of the job, and its possibilities for error are pretty constantly on my mind, and I sometimes wonder how accurate my answer will be when we're on our first trip across and I hear the question:

"Pilot to navigator, pilot to navigator: Where are we; where are we?"

Michael J. Flanagan Jr.

2nd Lt. A. C.

Courage Is Fear That Has Said Its Prayers

THREE weeks ago I returned to the United States after spending five months overseas. I am now on a convalescence furlough.

I have been through the apotheosis of adventure—not of the adventure of story-books, but real adventure, the savage taskmaster, awful of punishment and sweet of reward, faithless and whimsical, demanding terrible patience and heartbreaking days and nights of tiring toil, offering the blazing sunlight of glory or dark death at the end of thirst and hunger, or of the

long drag and monstrous delirium of rotting fever, through blood and sweat and stinging insects, leading up to culminations of lordly achievements. Strange as it may sound, I am waiting for the day when I will be able to go back for more.

Many of my friends here at home have asked me what makes soldiers brave enough to face combat. Also, what makes a man coward enough to try to shirk battle. I think I can answer both questions.

First, I have seen many men perform deeds of bravery while under fire, several who were considered heroes, for they were decorated. As for the coward, I can answer more simply—I have never seen one! True, there are many who are afraid before they encounter the enemy—I know I was. But it is a natural fear that comes from instinct and it insures preservation.

However, perfect bravery and cowardice are two extremes which are seldom reached by the American soldier. The space between the two is great, and comprehends all kinds of courage, between which there is much difference.

There are some men who expose themselves readily at the beginning of action, whereas others are satisfied to be more cautious before satisfying their reputation as a fighter.

I have seen some men who are not always equally masters of their fear; although I have seen some who are. In the first case, these are the ones who are carried away by general panic and shock.

There are some, too, who are eager to close in for hand-to-hand combat because they are afraid to remain behind—to face enemy artillery fire or a sniper, something they cannot see. There are others who strengthen their courage with smaller dangers, and prepare themselves for greater ones. Oddly enough, there are some of them who are steady and brave with the bayonet in their hand, and yet dread exposure to rifle fire; others are steady under fire and dread the bayonet.

I do say this for the average American soldier: He is one who is naturally afraid and frightened before his first encounter with the enemy, only because it is new and uncertain to him.

But give him two scraps with his opponent and he never balks again. But whether it may have been his first or last fight, I have never seen a coward in the American Army, so it is very evident that the fear of death has not subtracted anything from the American soldier's courage—or his results!

Perhaps it can be best said, courage is fear that has said its prayers.

Wesley W. Morgan,
Cpl. Cn. Co., 145th Infantry.

I WAS deeply impressed by an incident that took place a few days ago. It happened at the Service Men's Center in Washington.

A young sailor, who looked like a quarterback from a high-school eleven, was relating some personal experiences in the various theaters of the present conflict. It seems he had been at Pearl Harbor on that fateful December morning; had participated in the decisive battle of Midway, and even helped to carry those bombs to Tokyo. Not content with that, he also had served at Guadalcanal during its worst days.

As he sat in the snack-room answering the eager questions of us all about him, a big, burly sergeant at the next table was listening with dark doubt on his face. Presently he challenged the young seaman to show his ribbons. The embarrassed boy looked at him for a moment. Then from somewhere in his blouse he drew out an envelope and opened it carefully. Out came four ribbons, a silver star (denoting five battles) and one bronze star. Six major battles in all!

Abruptly the sergeant turned away, then wheeled back suddenly and demanded to know why the sailor wasn't wearing the ribbons. The sailor was awkward in his explanation, but said he thought the darned things always seemed to him to spoil the shape of his blouse.

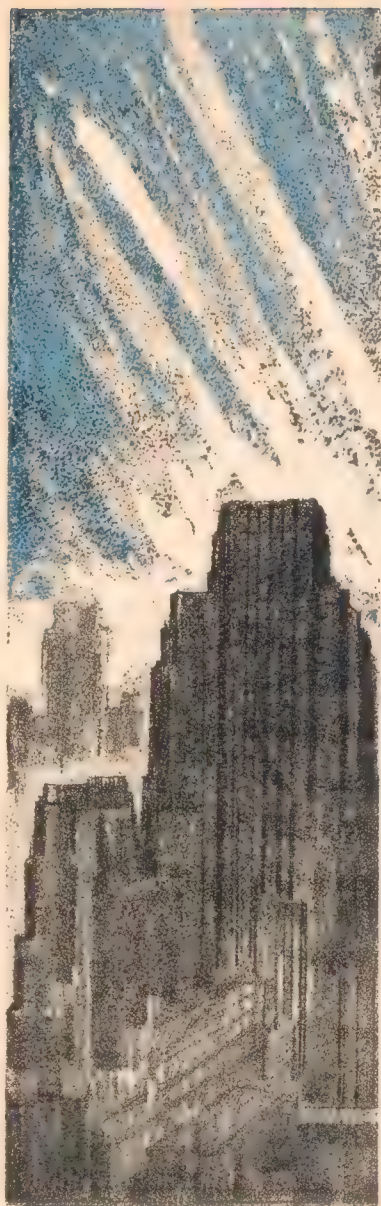
The soldier stood silently for a minute as if groping in the dark for words. He reached out a big, clumsy hand and gently touched the sailor's decorations. His head came up slowly and reverently, and there was agony in his eyes. He apologized for the things he had said, but he failed completely when he tried to conceal the break in his voice.

"I'm not even fit for the service," he said. "They discharged me from the Army this morning."

In the long silence that followed, we were all staring at the ribbon the soldier was wearing, and I noticed that his left hand—or what had been a hand—dangled helplessly at his side, torn and bent beyond use.

Since I left that scene, I have been haunted by the thought that maybe we've failed to recognize many of our unsung, unheralded heroes like this poor fellow, and that most of the real men of courage and sacrifice are listed simply as casualties of war—and nothing more. But above all, I thank God that we still have men who care and share, and heroes who love America enough to go the limit, if need be, in her defense!

Cpl. Roy H. Fletcher,
Fl. Meade, Md.



The PAST

BILL CRAWFORD was, probably, the most popular man in the whole organization of Quest, Incorporated. Everyone who knew him had a liking for him. He was quiet, and a smallish man; during the war he had served in a bomb bay, but had won no medals and was no hero. There was a deep human sympathy about him that somehow communicated itself to all who came in contact with him.



EARNS *the* FUTURE

A Post-War Drama
by GORDON KEYNE

Yet he was extremely reserved; no one knew anything of his private life, he never mentioned it. He was in no way spectacular, but he did have a knack of getting things done.

Steve Luring, president of Quest, had summoned Crawford to his office. Luring was not a kindly person, nor hesitant; he was bluff and dynamic. Yet now, as he spoke, he seemed somehow embarrassed. His words had a touch of forced lightness.

"Bill, I'll make you a prediction. You're going to take a long journey, you'll meet a dark man and a fair lady, and you may encounter trouble."

Crawford nodded. "Okay, Chief," he said, thumbing his mustache. It was a neatly tended mustache, though God knows he had little vanity. His pleasant smile and bright gray eyes showed an interest in everything.

"By heavens, they're making fools of us!" exploded Luring in a sudden

burst of anger, and smashed his fist down on his desk.

"Who, Chief?"

"Our San Francisco office. They've signed up with a client for the craziest thing I ever heard of. It's an endowment case, charity. Worse, the Government has already made an extensive search and failed. And a huge amount of money is involved."

"We've never yet handled an easy case," said Crawford.

His quiet voice, the truth of his words, calmed Luring. Again Luring eyed him almost uneasily, as though hesitant to broach what lay in mind.

EVEN in the amazing years after the war, when new and astonishing things sprang up everywhere, Quest, Incorporated, was unique. During the long conflict terrible confusion arose in the world. When peace arrived, people of all sorts and classes had vanished from sight in revolutions, mass deportations, destructive campaigns. Then, what happened to one or a thousand persons mattered little; no such cataclysm had ever before happened on earth. But now, with peace, when the ranks of family and society had reformed, even human life once more became worth something.

Thus was born Quest, Incorporated. Its work lay in finding mislaid individuals or in establishing their deaths, or in discovering lost things. A lucrative work; success made Quest a world-wide institution. Nor was all its endeavor for financial gain.

Grateful clients of wealth and powerful figures indebted to Quest, had established endowments, enabling the firm to give its services in cases of poverty and distress, which were numerous. The world's post-war reaction had been a surge of charity, of brotherly love, of warm human and Christian emotions, and much of Quest's work involved obscure and humble persons.

"During the last long campaign against the Japanese islands," said Luring, glancing at some data before him, "a transport plane was lost in western Alaska. Aboard were a dozen officers, including a general; a couple of entertainers bound for army camps; and the cash payroll for the armed services and the construction works in those parts, amounting to several million dollars. The crew and passengers bailed out amid blinding snow and storm; nearly all survived, but the two entertainers did not, and their bodies were never found, nor was the wrecked plane. They apparently followed it into the Bering Straits."

Crawford sat unmoving, curiously still in every nerve and muscle, a slight pallor overspreading his thin, bony features. He felt a chill hand gripping at his heart, the coldly inexorable hand of the past. It was not by accident that Luring had sent for him, he perceived. Steve Luring was one of the few people who knew the details of his past life.

"Neither of the two entertainers were famous people, though both were well known." Luring's voice rasped on, and Crawford could feel it filing his nerves raw. "One of them was Ted Kramer, a dance-band pianist of note; the other was—"

"His wife, a singer known as Flo Hardwick," said Crawford. "It was not her real name."

Luring leaned back and gave him a long, steady look, then spoke gently.

"Well, Bill, I'm sorry this had to bob up. God knows I wanted to spare you! But I figured you ought to know about it. You don't need to take the case. I know it must hurt—"

"You're wrong; it ceased to hurt long ago," broke in Crawford. "It's good of you to take that attitude, but let's forget that I'm an interested party. Of course I'll take it. I'd want to take it. So go ahead, as though I were an outsider."

"Okay," said Luring, and leaned forward again. "Well, there's a woman named Kramer; she's some relative of the musician, possibly his sister—I don't know. The information isn't clear. She's destitute, and seems to have hypnotized our San Francisco office. She's positive that she recognized Kramer's playing in a broadcast from Fairbanks, a couple of weeks ago. Fantastic rot!"

"On the contrary, it makes sense," Crawford put in. "Musicians instantly recognize one another's playing, especially in dance bands."

Luring, who was not a musician, grunted skeptically.

"Our Frisco office investigated in Fairbanks and drew an absolute blank. Now the damned fools have assigned one of our endowment accounts to this Kramer woman. They're actually sending her up there. At the moment they're shy on field agents, and so is Chicago, so they asked me to send someone to handle the case."

He paused, and Crawford nodded.

"I'll take it."

"Very well. But—jumping Judas! I don't know what's got into our western office! To send her up there with our agent! Why, they're lunatics!"

"There must be a reason. You talked with them? Perhaps something they didn't care to mention on the air."

"Perhaps. Well, you go see."

"Go where?"

"To Fairbanks. Catch the Edmonton Overnight; connect there with the Canadian Oriental line, which will drop you at Fairbanks. We'll book you through and make reservations at the Fairbanks Biltmore, where Mrs. Kramer will meet you tomorrow morning. And—Bill!"

"Yes?"

"Watch your step. Something about this job is cockeyed, underhand, risky. I don't know what it is, but I can smell it. If you want to change your mind—"

"I don't, thanks."

"Very well. Take the rest of the day off. I'll send the bookings to your apartment before seven tonight. The Overnight bus leaves at eight.

I'm digging for information in one or two quarters and if anything turns up I'll let you know. Suit you?"

"Quite. Much obliged."

Bill Crawford went home to his flat in a huge building in the Forties, overlooking the East River. He felt cold and numb inside; but this was his job and he faced it without shrinking. On the record, he was a widower. Steve Luring was the only man in the firm who knew the truth, and it was remarkable that Luring should have remembered it.

Crawford poured a drink and gulped it, then sat at his desk by the window. Opening the locked drawer that held his private papers, he drew out the envelope of clippings. This was all he had to remind him of five years ago—a bunch of faded newspaper clippings.

"Luring was awfully decent about it," he told himself. "Perhaps I should have got a divorce; but why? I had no reason."

He had not looked at these old war-time clippings for five years, and it did not hurt in the least to look at them now. He found himself impervious, and smiled ironically. The lost musician and his wife, the singer known as Flo Hardwick, had certainly received a better press in death than in life! Crawford's irony deepened as he ran his eye over the clippings. Here were pictures of the pair; he spread them out.

"His wife—save the mark! Well, they got away with it," he observed. "Emily was just a publicity-struck little tramp; there was no great harm in her and she did have her good points. She never gave a damn for me. Yes, they got away with it in life and death both. I presume the tragedy came too swiftly, what with the war news and all, for the truth about their relations ever to leak out."

AND he himself had been a happier man ever since; that was the queer part of it.

With his present task in mind he studied the clippings. He was going to Fairbanks, in the center of Alaska. Thanks to its strategic position on the Great Circle course to the Far East, Fairbanks was now, like Edmonton, a huge city of the air age; the tremendous post-war boom and development in Alaska had combined to make Fairbanks the capital of this newest State of the Union.

Here were the published reports of the War Department regarding the tragedy. Though most of its personnel had survived, the plane itself had vanished without trace; bound for Nome, it had presumably been thrown off course by storm.

Here was the immediate question: Had Kramer, after all, survived?

Crawford studied the sleekly groomed features of the musician and shook his head. Granted any survival, the man could not have kept the fact hidden; his life-work, his career, hinged on his name and ability. He would have been unable to keep the fact from being known; he had no reason to do so.

"No, I guess it's just another false alarm," Crawford decided, tucking the pictures into his wallet. "This Kramer woman has kidded herself, or she may be a sensation-seeker. Wonder who she is? We'll see tomorrow."

THIS little session with his past left him immensely cheered. He was over the shock. He could think about it, face it, without the least sting. He was packing his bag, before going out to dinner, when the phone rang. Luring was on the line.

"Bill? An envelope is going to you with the reservations; it holds all the dope I could turn up. It may have nothing to do with your errand. And don't forget to take that dinkum camera of yours; may come in handy. Good luck to you, old man, and happy landings!"

Crawford's camera outfit was in its own bag—the orthonic camera, that strange electronic device evolved during the war, which so few men could learn to master. Crawford was an adept at it and invariably carried it when in the field; it was often of use.

When the messenger arrived with his passport, tickets, expense money and the envelope, he went out to dinner. At the table, he opened Luring's envelope and found only a short typed paragraph. It read:

"Three years ago the Government was queried through a Fairbanks attorney regarding a salvage grant provided the lost Transport J 354 could be located and its payroll contents recovered. The Government refused to make any such grant and the matter came to nothing. The attorney's client was an unknown party who could not be traced. Verbum sap."

"A word to the wise, eh?" ruminated Crawford, fingering his mustache to a fine point. "Your tip is suggestive, Mr. Luring! Suppose someone knew where to find the plane wreckage. Suppose that someone were the musician Ted Kramer, who had escaped from the wreck, hidden away, and was still alive. Hm! Possible, but highly improbable. I fear the eye of suspicion sees clues where none exists. And yet, a plane bound for Nome would pass not too far from Fairbanks! But the idea is too far-fetched."

No doubt some hopeful crackpot had hoped to locate the wreckage, had approached the Government, and had been summarily refused any salvage. The question of salvage rights in lost



payroll money was a point for the law to decide. . . .

That night Crawford went to sleep on his express liner and wakened at Edmonton, now Canada's greatest city, thanks to the air transport lines that crossed here, and to the Alaskan boom. He connected with the Canadian ship, and at ten next morning landed at the Fairbanks airport, amid scenes of clamorous bustle that would have been utterly incredible to an Alaskan oldtimer.

The enormous city was the center of a staggering air activity; indeed, it had a dozen airfields, since the huge Alaskan development was a result of the air age. The opening up of the Bering oilfields was entirely due to air. This new State had been largely populated by Army and Air Corps veterans, who here found an outlet for their energy; and every Alaskan farm had its own plane or helicopter.

Checking in at the massive bulk of the Biltmore, Crawford found a note awaiting him asking that he get in touch with Mrs. Kramer in room C 415 upon his arrival. He called the room. A pleasant voice responded. The lady had arrived an hour previously; she agreed to meet him at noon for luncheon.

Crawford had a long day ahead—one that would last for several months

at this season, since summer under the Arctic Circle knows no night. He put in the time by getting caught up with local development; in the year since he had last been here, Fairbanks had grown enormously. He had some pictures to be printed, and located a photographer near the hotel who could handle the orthonic film.

"There was a lot of that business right after the war," said the photographer. "You don't see many orthonics nowadays; too complicated, I guess. Three or four years ago there was a cripple here who was a wizard with it. Used to rent him my outfit right along. But he struck oil or got in on the land boom up north or something. Haven't seen him in ages. I'll have the prints for you tomorrow, sure."

Promptly at twelve, Crawford met Mrs. Kramer.

At the luncheon table he appraised her. She was a quiet little woman in her early thirties; small, well-poised, neither pretty nor charming. But she knew how to dress and wore her clothes well. He sized her up as being practical, sensible and level-headed, a woman with whom it would be pleasant to work.

"We're partners in a difficult matter, Mrs. Kramer," he said. "If we want results, we must be quite honest with each other. First, I need to clear up the background. Your relationship with Ted Kramer is apparently a bit vague."

Her brown eyes dropped for a moment. "I—I left it so purposely. But I know I'll have to tell you everything. It won't be made public?"

"Quest never makes anything public. Whatever you say is confidential, I assure you."

"Thank you. Well, then—Ted Kramer was my husband."

This hit Crawford squarely under the belt.

"But I didn't know— Why, his wife was lost with him on that plane!"

"She was not his wife," Mrs. Kramer said quietly. "She only passed as such. Ted had left me, previously. It was arranged that I would get a divorce, but I delayed doing it; I was afraid of publicity, of scandal. When the news of his death was known, the newspapers assumed that the Flo Hardwick with him was his wife. I had used that name in singing, you see. I said nothing; I was ill and stunned and unable to say anything. There was so much war news that nobody cared about—"

CRAWFORD, intent upon her words, ceased to hear them. The enormous irony of the situation struck him full force; he felt like bursting into a shout of Homeric laughter. This woman, the wife of Ted Kramer! And she did not dream that she was

talking to Flo Hardwick's husband! But he only sat there twisting at his mustache, as she talked on.

"Naturally, I could recognize Ted's piano touch when I heard it," she concluded. "It was quite distinctive; there could be no mistake. I know he is alive, Mr. Crawford! I heard it twice, not just once."

"Coming from here—Fairbanks?"

"Yes. Your San Francisco office investigated. The broadcast came from a studio on the top floor of this very hotel. But no Ted Kramer had been in that band; the name was well remembered. The pianist, they said, was someone named Lewison who had been picked up here for the occasion. I don't care what they said; I know who was playing that piano!"

CRAWFORD nodded. "The first step is to finish our lunch, then go upstairs and talk with the manager of this broadcast studio."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Then you don't think that I—that it's all nonsense?"

"Indeed I don't. My business is not to think—not yet, anyhow. Just to look into the matter carefully."

*Illustrated by
Frederic
Anderson*

He had been sadly aware of a rock beneath his own head, and now, looking for that rock, he found it—smashing Beeston's head down upon it, twice.

When we go upstairs, please leave the talking to me."

The manager of the station received them in his office in the top-floor studio, and assented when Crawford stated their business. The inquiries from San Francisco had come to him, and the matter was fresh in his memory.

He asserted:

"The band on the air at that time was a visiting band from Seattle. Their pianist was ill. We sent out a call for someone to fill his place, and this man Lewison applied. He was tried out, and he proved so good they wanted to keep him permanently."

"And did they?"

"No. He refused. He's from Holtville, one of the new boom towns forty miles south. He has a farm near there, and oil lands. It's quite certain that he's not Ted Kramer. One of our own musicians here used to know Kramer and is positive. Lewison is very crippled and has little or no strength; he was injured during the war. I understand."

"Doesn't it take strength to handle the piano with a dance band?"

"Precisely the point, Mr. Crawford. After each broadcast, poor Lewison was completely done up. His wife had to almost carry him down to their room. A remarkable woman, that; she watched over him like a baby and gave him every care. So he would not listen to the offer of any place with the band; nor did he need the job. He appeared just for the fun of it. I gather that he is quite well off, with his oil and so on."

Mrs. Kramer had obviously lost hope. Crawford, however, pursued his inquiry.

"Do you know where these Lewisons came from, what their background is?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. I imagine you could find out at Holtville."

Politely, the manager bowed them out.

At the elevator, Crawford met the resigned eyes of his companion, and smiled.

"Relax," he said. "You are being brave about it; good girl! Don't give up. Now get your things and meet me in the lobby in ten minutes. We're going to Holtville. On the spot!"

"You haven't given up?" she exclaimed, plucking up heart.

"Quest never gives up, Mrs. Kramer!" he said cheerfully—but to himself, he admitted that the search was as good as ended right now.

THE "Helicopters for Hire" sign at the lobby's end drew Crawford. A brisk young man at the desk beneath the sign answered his inquiry.

"Depends on what you want, sir. How many in the party?"

"Two of us."

"Then I might take you out myself, in case you want a driver. I don't let anyone else handle my bus—"



"That's quite all right. I need someone who knows the country. I want to go to Holtville, perhaps elsewhere."

The young man, whose name was Perkins, closed his desk happily.

"I'm hired! Haven't been in the air for a week, and I'm raring to go to Holtville! Why, Mister, my girl lives there! Yep. I came up here after the war with the first bunch of veterans. If I don't know this country, nobody does!"

"Ever hear of a Holtville man by the name of Lewison?"

"A cripple with a beard? Do I!" Perkins became effusive. "Why, I used to take him and his wife everywhere, before he got a bus of his own! At that, I still drive him now and then. Brought him up here for a broadcast, a couple weeks ago, and took him back. He's a piano player as well as a farmer. Say, isn't that an orthonic camera outfit you have?"

Crawford glanced down at the case he had brought along.

"Recognize it, do you?"

"Yep. Lewison has one of 'em. Many's the time I've taken him down the coast below Nome to get photos. There was one place he used to go steady, to get art pictures of the water on the rocks, by the islands."

Crawford pricked up his ears. The photographer had mentioned a cripple who used an orthonic camera.

"Yes, I've heard of that place," he rejoined. "I'd like to get some shots of it myself. Do you suppose we could go there first and get a few pictures of the exact spot, and stop at Holtville later?"

"I've got the time if you have," said Perkins. "I can find the place, sure, but it's quite a run over to the coast. You know Mrs. Lewison? She's sure a wonder! Runs things better'n any man. I hear she's got her brother at the farm now, to help. . . . Let's see! I met him, but it's a sort of difficult name to remember."

Crawford paused, on the hairline of destiny. His wife Emily had often talked about her brother Tom, though Crawford had never met the man. Impulse gave him a shove.

"I suppose," he said lightly, smiling at the conceit, "his name wouldn't be Beeston, would it?"

The face of Perkins lit up. "That's it—Tom Beeston, of course! Well, I'll go get my hat and be right with you. We'll drive to the airport in my car."

Mrs. Kramer came to the desk where Crawford was stiffly standing.

"Why, Mr. Crawford! Are you ill?" she exclaimed. "You're ghastly pale—is anything wrong?"

Crawford pulled himself together and managed a mechanical smile. Perkins was returning. He introduced the young man.

"A touch of indigestion," he said. "We're taking a run by helicopter to the coast for some pictures of the scenery, then to Holtville."

"How lovely! Those helicopters fascinate me, but I've never been in one," she exclaimed. "Are you sure you're quite able?"

Crawford laughed, twirled his mustache jauntily, and remembered little more of what was said. Perkins drove them out to the airport, got his little crimson plastic helicopter from the hangar, and loaded them in. As soon as clearance came from the Air Control, they were up and off.

Perkins showed Mrs. Kramer the sights. Crawford sat behind them, an automaton, silent and with mind blank. So totally unexpected had been the revelation, with such vivid clarity and finality had the truth been bared in the fraction of an instant, that the shock had been acute. After a bit he got himself in hand and his brain readjusted itself. He began to think once more. He had most desperately to think; there was no evading the truth, and what he did not know he must guess. Gradually he got the amazing thing in some focus.

So Ted Kramer, surviving that crash as a bearded cripple, and Flo Hardwick with him, had taken another name. In Alaska's icy desolation, of those days, they had survived. The hurt man must have taken long to heal, even in part. Meantime, the great post-war boom had surged forward. With the orthonic camera which needed no sunlight, which pierced fog or rain alike, the scene of the crash somewhere on the coast had been mapped and the wreckage discovered.

He could reconstruct the rest, and plunged at the guesswork structure. The pair had recovered sufficient of the payroll money to make them rich for life. The Government had refused salvage, so they went ahead with recovery of the money, safe in this newly opened country where the past could be hidden and forgotten.

NOW there was no escape for Bill Crawford; no matter the cost, he must see the whole affair through.

They sighted the coast, the far glitter of Bering Straits, and came down above the rocky shore. This was the spot, said Perkins; this bay with the hungry offshore rocks, and particularly the half-submerged patch on the south side. That was where Lewison used to get his art studies. Crawford got out his camera and took a few perfunctory shots, but his first intentions had been totally changed. He tapped Perkins on the shoulder.

"See that strip of sand back from the beach? I wish you'd land there. I'd like to stretch my legs, and I need

to discuss a matter with Mrs. Kramer, privately."

"You bet," Perkins assented. "I have to adjust this gas feed, too; somebody's been monkeying with the darned thing."

The helicopter, without so much as a bump, came down onto the sand. Crawford gave Mrs. Kramer his arm and they walked out along the rocks in the whipping wind that came from Asia.

"What is it, Mr. Crawford?" she asked composedly. "I know from your face that something has happened."

"Yes; at least, I've learned something. I've discovered that the crippled musician, Lewison, must be Ted Kramer. His wife is certainly Flo Hardwick, for Beeston was her maiden name, Emily Beeston. Her brother, Tom Beeston, is at their Holtville farm."

She made no comment. He went on to recount his surmises, and she heard him silently.

"Now it's up to you," he finished.

"If they've grown rich by the recovery of that Government money, as I conclude, the Federal authorities will step in. We can go to Holtville and have it out with them; or we can leave them alone and let a Federal man handle the matter. The choice is yours."

For a little she stood looking out at the blowing sunlit water, then turned to him. Agitation was in her face, but her brown eyes were steady, and her voice.

"My interest is not in that money, and I'm no Federal agent. If this man is my husband, I want to know it. Let's have no sneaking around, but go there and settle things face to face."

"Very well," assented Crawford. "For my own guidance, let me ask just what you hope to get out of this? Or do you expect to take him back?"

"Of course not!" she replied quickly, harshly, but her eyes belied the harsh tone. "To be honest, I don't know. I've wanted to learn whether he were alive, that was all. I hadn't thought about other complications." She stood looking down now, her fingers twisting and untwisting, her hair blowing about her perplexed features. "I don't know. Suppose we go there first, and I'll decide on my course."

"Very well," he said again, without emotion. The truth was plain to him; she had hoped against hope to find Ted Kramer alive and to resume life with him. Before the magnitude of this woman's inner torment and stricken spirit, his own problem was a puny one. He, at least, cared little whether Emily Beeston-Crawford-Hardwick were alive or dead.

So they loaded into the car again and were off for the Lewison farm a few miles outside Holtville. Perkins,

careless of the silence his passengers displayed, prattled along garrulously. He was full of admiration for Mrs. Lewison, it appeared.

She had taken up that land when it was worthless, and now the place was doing well with a fine house and buildings. She had managed capably and efficiently, at the same time taking care of her almost helpless husband; she was worth any half-dozen men in Alaska, said Perkins, so far as character went. She had looks, too.

Crawford exchanged a glance with Mrs. Kramer and made no comment.

The Lewison place came into sight. Perkins hovered above it at five hundred feet, pointing out the house within its windbreak of trees.

"I see their bus is gone," he said. "They've got a two-seater helicopter of bright green plastic, a dandy. I expect they're in town doing their trading."

"Suppose you land us, leave us there for an hour or so, then come back to pick us up," suggested Crawford. "If they've not returned by that time, we'll go back to the city."

"Fair enough," said Perkins. "I'll skip over to Holtville and see my girl."

They floated down to the green expanse before the house. This was a solid, well-built structure of hollow tile and cement, well adapted to stand the Alaskan winters. When the two passengers alighted, the blades whirled, the car lifted, and headed for town. Mrs. Kramer looked at Crawford.

"Well, what's your purpose here? We've no object, if they're gone."

"I think we might have a few words with Beeston and, so far as we're concerned, make certain of our facts. Then you can decide what to do. Hello! This must be our man."

AROUND the corner of the house came a strapping figure in overalls, a brawny, red-faced man who had evidently been at work somewhere in the rear. He was wiping his face with a bandanna, for the Alaskan summer was hot.

"Hello!" he cried. "I thought you was Doc Howell stopping in; this is his day. I saw the ship come down, but it wasn't his after all. Looking for somebody?"

"I think we're looking for you," Crawford said amiably. "That is, if you're Mr. Tom Beeston." Taking out his wallet, he produced the old newspaper clipping with the pictures of Ted Kramer and Flo Hardwick. He handed this to Beeston. "Perhaps you recognize these faces? I'm an agent for Quest, Incorporated. This is Mrs. Kramer. I take it that no one is at home?"

"No, they went to a movie in town—"

Beeston's voice died, as the facts impacted on his brain. He pushed the clipping away, and a low groan escaped him. He looked from Crawford to Mrs. Kramer, his rugged face knotted and twisting.

"So it's come," he said in a hollow voice. "I knew it. I knew it would come."

"Yes, there's no escaping it," was Crawford's cheerful response. "But we can discuss things pleasantly. We'll not come inside. Our ship will be back to pick us up after a bit. So you expected this would come, Mr. Beeston?"

The other nodded and, swallowing hard, centered his attention on Mrs. Kramer. He seemed lost in a bewilderment of fear and dismay.

"Yes, sure. I thought you'd run us down sooner or later; I mean, them. Only I'm in it with them. I couldn't help but be, after I learned what happened. . . . Look here, ma'am!" he broke out earnestly. "You're Mrs. Kramer, huh? I know it was tough on you. But just the same, you don't know the whole story, or you'd have a heart!"

She regarded him calmly, displaying no emotion at all.

"Do you mean," she asked, "that after my husband deserted me and ran away with another woman, hiding from the world, that I should do nothing about it, now that I've found them?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought about your side of it, ma'am," blundered the man almost desperately. "Maybe you think Emily is plain bad, but she's not. And you don't know what they been through together; you got no idea! Ted was all broke to pieces and not out of bed for a couple years. Doc Howell could tell you how bad off he was. She was hurt, too, but she stuck by him, and they pulled through somehow and made a go of it—"

"Really, Mr. Beeston," she broke in quietly, "I'm not interested in that."

"But I'm trying to make you understand, ma'am! They're not bad; they're just two folks made for each other, honest! I'm not standing up for Emily just because she's my sister. They're the grandest couple I ever knew!"

"I've nothing against them, if that's what you mean," Mrs. Kramer said gently. "I've no desire to punish anyone. Ted Kramer is legally my husband, you know, and you don't have to defend him, or her either—"

Crawford intervened quickly, for she was evidently keeping her self-control with an effort.

"Now wait a minute. Beeston, we don't want to make a bad matter worse," he cut in. "I've taken some pictures today at a certain spot on the

coast, where the transport plane was wrecked. You know the spot I mean."

Beeston gave him a surly stare. "Well, what about it?"

"I want to make you realize fully that Mrs. Kramer has the situation in her own control and is able to dictate whatever terms she may desire. For that matter, you're as much implicated as the others, being an accessory after the fact."

"I don't get you," snapped Beeston. "What fact?"

"Theft of Government money. I know that the Lewisons, or Ted Kramer and your sister, located the wreckage, contacted the Government in hopes of salvage, but failed. Then they simply removed the money, perhaps with your help, from the wreck age."

"It's a lie!" shot out the man. Brows beetling, fists clenching and unclenching, he stared, breathing hard. Crawford was reminded of sullen thunderheads, apt to blaze forth at any instant into a savage lightning-bolt.

"You're a liar by the clock!" went on the man. "They never saw a cent of that money! None of us did!"

"All the money here came from striking oil, eh?"

"Of course it did. It's no secret."

PERHAPS Crawford should have stopped there; but he was driving ahead under the urge of his theories.

"No doubt oil was struck, eventually. Meantime, did anybody make report to Washington where the plane wreckage lay? No."

"But don't you see that they couldn't?" cried Beeston. "They didn't want it known that they were alive—"

"And prospering on money stolen from the wreckage; naturally! Well, get it into your head that Mrs. Kramer holds the whip and is able to crack it if she so desires. I don't know what she intends to do—"

"But I know damned good and well what I intend to do!" broke in Beeston, with sudden wild fury. "You rotten cheap detective, you've framed up this stolen-money story and think you can get away with your cheap trick! You can't do it, and I'm going to beat the living hell out of you right here and now!"

As he spoke, he flung himself at Crawford.

A scream broke from Mrs. Kramer. That utterly savage attack knocked the smaller man sprawling and Beeston leaped forward with animal ferocity to make good his threat. He flung himself upon the recovering Crawford, grappling and flailing in wild blows, hammering him to earth again. And there, so far as Beeston was concerned, the encounter ended.

Long since, Crawford had learned to meet size with skill, proving the

"When a doctor does a job like that on a man, he feels responsible, as if that man belongs to him. But I'd never have done it except for her faith and confidence."



old adage about the smaller the man, the greater the risk. He grappled Beeston close, got in his knee with deadly effect, cracked down Beeston's jaw against his own skull, and then was twisting uppermost while his dazed opponent floundered.

He had been sadly aware of a rock beneath his own head, and now, looking for that rock, he found it—smashing Beeston's head down upon it, twice. At the second crashing impact, the man uttered a gasping groan and went limp.

Crawford rose, gulping for air. Mrs. Kramer was white and horrified.

"It's all right," he reassured her.

"But you're hurt! Your face—"

"Oh, it's all here." He essayed a grin, and looked up sharply. "Hello! Now what?"

A car was turning in from the road. It halted near them. A gray-haired man leaped out with surprising agility and hurried toward them.

"Hi! What's going on here?" he demanded.

"Easy does it," said Crawford. "Who are you?"

"I guess you're a stranger hereabouts," was the response, "since you don't know Doc Howell. I was practicing medicine here before you were born. So you've had a scrap with Tom Beeston! My Lord, what a face you've got! Let's see it."

"Gladly, Doc. He got to me first."

"You seem to have settled him. Let's have a look at you. Tom's tough; he'll keep."

The elderly man, weather-beaten and grim, gave hurried but deft ministrations.

"Strangers here, are you?" he demanded.

"You said it," returned Crawford. "Mrs. Kramer, this is Doc Howell—"

"Kramer!" The physician straightened up as though he had been shot. He took Mrs. Kramer's proffered hand and peered at her with devouring eyes. "Mrs. Kramer—what? It can't be! Not Ted Kramer's wife?"

SHE tried to reply but could only stare at him in stupefied amazement and alarm. Crawford intervened, startled by the man's air.

"Doc! Do you mean to say that you know who Ted Kramer is?"

The other grunted. "Young man, do you think a doctor can deal night and day for years with a patient who's been busted all to hell and gone, without knowing the ins and outs of that patient's history? Certainly I know; there's nothing about him I don't know. Now I begin to see what caused this fracas. Lucky thing I dropped in. Anybody home?"

"Beeston said they're in town. I've helped Mrs. Kramer run this affair down—"

"Shut up. I'm going to take charge here," snapped Doc Howell. In momentary silence, he stood rubbing one palm across his grizzled chin, not taking his eyes from Mrs. Kramer. They were hard eyes, thoughtful and dominant eyes. The man himself had

force. "You look to me like a sensible woman, Mrs. Kramer," he continued slowly. "While I suppose you feel sort of bitter about the situation—"

"I'm not sensible! And what business is it of yours?" she flared out abruptly. "Who asked you to interfere? Haven't I every right to feel bitter?"

"How would I know?" He fairly shouted the words; suddenly he became an irate old man. "You and your private detective have barged in here and made trouble. Now listen to me! I have something to say, and it's my business, and I don't care what your rights or claims may be. I want to tell you something about this woman you prob'ly want to arrest and so forth. Maybe she did bust up your home. I don't know."

The staring silence of Mrs. Kramer dampened his excitement.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but I got a right to say my piece," he went on apologetically. "You see, this man was my patient, this Lewison or Kramer. I saved his life and got him on his feet after it looked impossible. When a doctor does a job like that on a man, he feels responsible for a lot of things, as if that man belongs to him. But I'd never have done it except for her, and her faith, her help and confidence."

He paused. Mrs. Kramer had quieted and was regarding him steadily. The deep stir of his emotion had impressed her; it even conquered

Crawford, who was astonished by the outfing vibrant force of the old physician.

"That woman took care of him like a baby," went on Doc Howell earnestly. "She could have quit him any time. Instead, she slaved for him and went hungry so he could eat. She watched over him when they were just two helpless fugitives hiding their guilt and themselves. She kept him alive when I had about given up. She's earned something, that woman has! Why, those two belong to each other—I say it to your face, ma'am! They've been through hell together!"

Mrs. KRAMER's gentle eyes had widened a little. Those words must have beat and beat upon her like fluttering wings; her fingers were clenched, her face was white. Her attitude, in turn, impressed the old physician.

"You've got to overlook my heat, ma'am," he resumed. "No matter what kind of a woman she may be in your eyes, she's true blue. Life was no joke here, in the old days. She built up this place with her own hands and brain, working at it like a dog. She did odd jobs to keep him eating. She got a job singing, and wore out her throat at it after I warned her to quit; that's why she talks in a half-whisper now, and always will. She borrowed money at the bank and took up every note on the land, and finally got to taking in cheap nail and selling it dear—and in the end they struck oil. And now, now—you've got to come along and slap 'em down. I just can't see it done without putting in my oar. You and your private detective—*arrgh!*"

That awakened Crawford to life.

"Doc, your devotion to your patient is laudable, but you don't savvy the situation," he said. Howell turned and gave him a long, troubled look. "Mrs. Kramer was not drawn here by motives of revenge, as you suppose, but by old affection, by deep regard for the man who had abandoned her. She didn't come here to cause trouble. We only learned the situation today. But we've also learned something else. I presume you know about the wreckage of the plane, and the money in it. Money that belongs to the Government."

Doc Howell's grim face looked perturbed and anxious.

"So you know about that, do you?"

"Yes. I'm not a detective; I've no interest in that money. But your talk of altruism and ideals is negated by the fact that Kramer knew where that money lay and kept quiet, and made use of it, and never informed the Government."

"Wait, now, wait!" broke out Doc Howell. "You don't get the picture.

Mrs. Lewison thinks it's been done. She made him send money to his wife, to Mrs. Kramer here. She made him notify the Government about that money. She was real set on it. She never gave him a minute's peace till the letters were written."

Crawford shook his head. "No go, Doc. There's no record of any—"

"Hold on, will you?" cried the other. "Just the other day, I found he had never sent those letters. I've got no brief for him; he's got his failings like any other man. I guess he even thought to make use of that money himself, some day. But he was scared to send those letters off, scared it would end everything for them, scared it would fetch the world down on them, chiefly on her! Every time he started to mail those letters, he lost heart and just couldn't do it. She thought they'd been sent off, long ago."

There was a slight silence. Mrs. Kramer was trying to speak; she lifted her hand, then dropped it.

"I can understand that," she said softly, almost in a whisper. "Yes, I can understand that perfectly. I'm so glad you told me this, Doctor."

"It's a good story," said Crawford. "And it does you credit, Doc—only I don't believe a word of it. Maybe they've imposed on you, and looted that wreckage long ago."

Doc Howell threw out his hands wearily, all his fire dying away.

"I was afraid of that accusation," he said. "I dropped in today meaning to force Ted to action—well, you can prove it easy enough. The house isn't locked up. Go into the back room where the desk is, and open the top right-hand drawer. In there, under some papers, are two big envelopes. One is addressed to Mrs. Kramer; it contains enough money to keep her for life. The other is addressed to Washington. It contains photographs and directions where to find the plane wreckage. I've seen 'em both. They never used any Government money; I know all about their oil deals. Go ahead. Prove it, Mister."

Crawford glanced at Mrs. Kramer. She had turned her back to them and was looking away, across the green patch. Doc Howell, suddenly mindful of Beeston, stepped forward to kneel beside the unconscious man. Crawford dabbed at his own tenderized features with careful fingers, then swung about and walked quickly to the house, and passed out of sight along the side, toward the rear.

After a time he came back. He was holding two large envelopes which were stamped and addressed, but unsealed. Mrs. Kramer stood as he had left her. Doc Howell was at work on Tom Beeston, who was now sitting up. Crawford went to Mrs. Kramer and gave her the two envelopes.

"Keep your own," he said. "Look in the other one; it proves all the Doc said. I guess I made a pretty wild guess about them having used that money; I was wrong, Mrs. Kramer. The business of Quest in this affair is finished; but we're here on your errand, and it's up to you to say whatever you want done."

She looked briefly in the envelope that held the photographs. Then she glanced up, as something above the treetops caught her eye. Crawford followed her gaze and saw the crimson helicopter approaching.

"That's Perkins coming back for us," he said. "Better make up your mind what you want done."

"Oh, that was made up long ago," she said quietly.

She went over to Beeston and Doc Howell, and handed the envelope of photographs to the physician.

"You'd better take charge of this and see that it's sent at once," she told him. "I'm glad to have met you, Doctor Howell. I'm glad, terribly glad, that you told me what you did. I agree with you that—that the future belongs to those who earned it. You might say to Ted that I took the letter addressed to me, and—and just as soon as the divorce is granted, I'll see that he's notified. That's all."

Her voice was not very steady. She turned quickly away from them and walked away, out toward the green space above which the helicopter was hovering.

Crawford's eyes followed her, then he, too, crossed over to the two men and looked down at the surly gaze of Beeston and the uncertain face of Doc Howell.

"I was wrong in my accusation, Beeston. I apologize," he said abruptly. "You know, of course, that before Mrs. Lewison came here, she was Mrs. Crawford? Yes, of course you do. I see you know it too, Doc."

DOC HOWELL nodded. Crawford thumbed his mustache to its usual points.

"Well, Doc, I want you to give her a message."

"A message?" repeated Doc Howell. "From you?"

"From me. Just say that I fully agree with Mrs. Kramer that the future has been well earned by the past, that I'm going to make a visit in Reno, and that I'll send word as soon as she is free to marry."

"But I don't understand!" Doc Howell said, perplexity in his eyes.

Crawford chuckled. "You will, Doc, you will—when I say that my name is Bill Crawford. So long."

He was still chuckling at thought of their two faces when the helicopter lifted and started back for Fairbanks and the outside world.

Under a Lucky Star*

The story of a Lifetime of Adventure

by ROY CHAPMAN ANDREWS

I WAS born in Beloit, Wisconsin, at approximately two o'clock in the morning of January 26, 1884, when the temperature was thirty degrees below zero. I am told that my eyes were so slanted that when Father first looked at me he said: "Why, I've begot a Chinaman!" That remark was current in our family long before, in later life, I went to China to live for eighteen years.

Beloit lay on the banks of the Rock River in a part of southern Wisconsin that was all fields and woods and rushing streams. I was like a rabbit, happy only when I could run out of doors. To stay in the house was torture to me then, and it has been ever since. Whatever the weather, in sun or rain, calm or storm, day or night, I was outside, unless my parents almost literally locked me in.

The greatest event of my early life was when, on my ninth birthday, Father gave me a little single-barrel shotgun. Previous to this I had been allowed to shoot Grandfather's muzzle-loader once or twice, but it was too much for me to negotiate with its forty-inch-long barrel.

It was with that little gun that I literally blew up my first wild goose. I was hunting just at dusk on the edge of a marsh north of Beloit. Six magnificent wild geese floating on a tiny patch of water showed up against the sunset sky. To stalk them, I had to crawl for nearly half a mile in mud and water, mostly on my stomach. Finally, I was near enough to shoot. At the roar of my gun, the three geese slowly collapsed with a gentle hissing sound, and out of a clump of bushes jumped Fred Fenton, a local sportsman. The sounds Fred made were far from gentle hissings. I'd shot his pneumatic decoys full of holes! Frightened half to death, I ran out of the marsh as fast as I could go and got home, shaking all over and sobbing hysterically. Even through my tears I could see that Father was roaring with laughter.

He kept saying over and over, "That's worth a hundred dollars to me. What I won't do to Fred Fenton! Just wait till I tell that downtown tomorrow. I'll buy you a double-barrel gun so you can get 'em all next time."

I didn't know until later that Fred Fenton was Dad's pet hate. Father was as good as his word, for the story lived in Beloit for years and I got a new double-barrel hammer gun within a week. . . .

My favorite book was *Robinson Crusoe*. My mother must have read it to me a dozen times, and I can still remember every part of it. I used to think that nothing could be more wonderful than to live on a faraway lonely island, shifting for myself.

From the time that I can remember anything I always intended to be an explorer, to work in a natural history museum, and to live out of doors. Actually, I never had any choice of a profession. I wanted to be an explorer and naturalist so passionately that anything else as a life work just never entered my mind. . . .

I didn't do a very good job in college, so far as studies were concerned, except in literature and science. Those

things came easy and I loved them. But most of the other subjects bored me exceedingly and I worked just hard enough to get medium grades. . . .

One of the most important events of my senior year was a visit to the college by Dr. Edmund Otis Hovey, Curator of Geology at the American Museum of Natural History of New York. Dr. Hovey came to lecture on the eruption of Mt. Pelée. Since the one desire of my life was to work in the American Museum, I hounded the hotel until I could see him. I spoke of my taxidermy work and very diffidently suggested that he go with me around the corner to Moran's saloon where some of my deer heads were hanging. He was exceedingly pleasant and said that he would speak to Dr. Bumpus, Director of the Museum, upon his return to New York. He did so, and I wrote the director myself. A note from Dr. Bumpus replied that there were no positions open, yet if I were in New York at any time he would be glad to see me—but, of course, not to come unless I had other business in the city. . . .

Graduation from college was a sad time for me. Suddenly, I realized that I had wasted time and opportunities; that although I was receiving a diploma, it really had not been earned. The graduation exercises were in the morning and that afternoon I went into the woods alone and stayed for hours, mostly sitting on the river bank. Mentally I took myself apart and examined the pieces. I didn't like what I saw. . . .

That night I told Mother of what I had been thinking. She sat there saying nothing while my words poured out in a flood. As a graduation surprise she and Father had arranged a fishing and camping trip into the great forests of northern Wisconsin. All the details were completed. She spoke about it then.

"I just don't want to go, Mother," I said. "It would be more of the same thing I've been doing. Just wasting time. I wouldn't enjoy it now. I want to go to New York and try to get into the Natural History Museum at once—next week."

She kissed me, and said, "All right, son." She was a wonderful woman, my mother. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

I MEET A WHALE

NEW YORK was next. I arrived at night and the magic city, as I first saw it from the deck of a Twenty-third Street ferry boat, was more beautiful than anything of which I had ever dreamed. Always I will remember how I felt as I saw it. . . .

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The next morning, Saturday, at eleven o'clock, I confronted the majestic façade of the American Museum of Natural History. Feeling very small, I was admitted to the Director's office in the east tower room, now the Osborn Research Laboratory. Years later, when I myself sat in the Director's chair in that very same room, and young men and women came to see me, obviously frightened half to death, I remembered, with a tug at my heart, and tried to do for them what Dr. Bumpus did for me that day. For he couldn't have been more friendly, and my fear left me as soon as he spoke. He was tall and spare with thinning hair and a small black mustache. An air of great vitality and tremendous energy held in check dominated his personality. He seemed like a race horse at the post, ready to leap down the track at the starter's signal. He looked at me with calm appraising eyes and seemed to be making up his mind as to what sort of person I was.

We talked for some time, or rather I did, for he only sat there asking me questions. At last he said, regretfully, that there wasn't a position of any kind open in the Museum. My heart dropped into my shoes. Finally I blurted out, "I'm not asking for a position. I just want to *work* here. You have to have someone to clean the floors. Couldn't I do that?"

"But," he said, "a man with a college education doesn't want to clean floors!"

"No," I said, "not just *any* floors. But the Museum floors are different. I'll clean them and love it, if you'll let me."

His face lighted with a smile. "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll give you a chance. You'll get forty dollars a month. You can start in the department of taxidermy with James L. Clark. Now come to lunch with me. Then I'll introduce you to Clark and the others." . . .

I had been in the Museum only a few months when my big chance came. In the Director's office I was introduced to a fussy little gray-haired gentleman named Richardson. He was, Dr. Bumpus said, going to build a life-size model of a whale to hang in the third floor gallery-well. I was to be his assistant. I was considerably frightened but tried not to show it. What I knew about whales was less than nothing. I had never met a whale in Wisconsin's Rock River! By that time, however, I had learned to keep my mouth shut and my eyes and ears open. No one could know how ignorant I was if I didn't talk. But the job wasn't as terrifying as it sounded for we were only to enlarge a scale model which Jim Clark had made under the direction of Dr. F. A. Lucas, then Director of the Brooklyn Museum.

Construction details, however, were a hidden mystery to me, for I've never had the slightest interest in mechanics. My mind doesn't run that way any more than to mathematics. But I got along all right because Richardson knew what he was about until we came to the paper covering. The framework of angle iron and bass wood strips was impressive, for the whale boasted a length of seventy-six feet. But the paper wouldn't work. It buckled and cracked and sank in between the ribs. Our whale looked awful. It seemed to be in the last stages of starvation. I used to dream about it at night, and the Director was in despair.

Finally, he called Jimmy Clark and me to his office. "This whale is getting on my nerves," he said. "It is beyond all endurance. What shall we do?"

Jimmy and I knew exactly what to do for we had spent many hours discussing that emaciated whale. "Fire the paper, gentlemen," we chorused, "and let us finish it with wire netting and papier-mâché."

The Director beamed. "Done. If you turn that wreck of a Cetacean into a fat, respectable whale, I'll give you both a knighthood."

Jimmy and I hopped to it with a crew of twelve men. It was amazing what a well-regulated diet of papier-mâché did for the beast. He lost that pitiful, starved, lost-on-dry-land appearance, his sides filled out and became as smooth as a rubber boot; we could almost feel him roll and blow as we built him up with our new tonic. After eight months, the job was done. During thirty-five years our whale has hung in the gallery and is still as good as new. He has been stared at by millions of eyes, and is still one of the most popular exhibits in the Museum.

Before the model was completed, my Lucky Star took charge again. A real honest-to-goodness whale was killed off the coast of Long Island at Amagansett. Jim Clark and I were sent to get the skeleton. The Director's instructions, as he dashed into and out of his office, were: "Get the whole thing; photographs, measurements, baleen and skeleton—every bone." We did not learn until afterward that he never believed we could do it. He and Dr. Lucas knew a lot about beached whales and how quickly the great bones sink into the sand.

I was the most excited and the proudest boy in New York State as we journeyed toward Amagansett. Only seven months in the Museum and off on an expedition! True, it wasn't an expedition to the Arctic or the tropics, but it was an expedition nonetheless.

ONCE we had arrived at the village, the business of buying the whale was quickly done. The baleen, or "whale bone," was the valuable part, for at that time it was still being used for corsets and carriage whips. I believe it cost us thirty-two hundred dollars, which was only a little more than the commercial value. They threw in the skeleton, but we were obligated to get the bones ourselves.

The carcass was beached just at the edge of low tide. After the fishermen had stripped off the blubber, they went away. Jimmy and I were faced with a real problem, for the skeleton lay embedded in some fifty tons of flesh. Of course we could do nothing alone, and the fishermen were not at all eager to work even for high wages. The thermometer stood at twenty above zero and the wind was bitter.

Finally, we did persuade half a dozen men to hack, away at the carcass with great knives. A horse helped to drag off huge chunks of meat by means of ropes and hooks. It was a slow business, but at last the head was separated and on the beach; also the ribs of the upper side. Then the worst happened. A storm blew up from the east, beating upon the exposed coast with hurricane force. We saw it coming and anchored our whale as best we could, working hip deep in the icy water.

For three days the shore was a smother of white surf. Anxiously we waited. Only half the skeleton was on the beach and that would be almost worthless if the remainder were lost. The fourth day was dead calm but very cold; twelve degrees above zero at noon. When we got to the beach, a smooth expanse of sand, innocent of whale, met our eyes. The bones had disappeared!

Jimmy and I were frantic, but the anchor ropes extended down into the sand where the bones had been. A little shoveling exposed the skeleton, deeply buried. It would have been difficult enough in the best circumstances to uncouple the huge vertebrae and get the ribs of the lower side, but now it was almost impossible. As soon as we dug out a shovelful of sand to get at a bone, the depression filled with water. We had to grope blindly with small knives, our arms in the freezing water up to the elbows, to disarticulate each vertebra.

Jimmy and I carried on alone for three days, warming our hands every few minutes over a driftwood fire. It seemed hopeless, and I don't mind saying that I never have suffered more in any experience of my life than I did then. But the Director had told us to get every bone,

and we simply couldn't give up. At last, some of the fishermen decided to help when they saw us two kids struggling hopelessly in that icy water. I believe it was more shame than the high wages which brought them to our assistance. Anyway, half a dozen men came, and we began to make real progress. At the end of a week a huge pile of bones lay well up on the beach. We checked them off one by one on a drawing from a skeleton in the Smithsonian Institution. They were all there except the pelvic rudiments and eventually these were rescued from the pot where the blubber was being tried out for oil. That meant we could return to New York with a clean bill of bones.

Those first months in the Museum were, I believe, the happiest of my life. Dr. Bumpus had given me not only his complete trust but his friendship as well. He took every opportunity to introduce me to visitors of importance and often asked me to walk with them through the Museum.

The man whom I most wanted to meet in the entire world was Frank M. Chapman. His *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America* had been my Bible. He was on an expedition to the Canadian Rockies to collect a group of ptarmigan with the famous bird artist Louis Fuertes when I came to New York. One day, a wave of excitement ran through the building. Frank Chapman had returned. He came with Dr. Bumpus to the taxidermy department to inspect some of his newly arrived specimens. When I was introduced I could hardly speak. To him I was only an embarrassed young man; to me, he was the living embodiment of everything I wanted to be. Frank Chapman is now seventy-nine years old but he still brings with him a wave of something fresh and vital whenever he enters a room. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

SUBMARINE COURTSHIP

MR. GEORGE S. BOWDOIN, one of the partners of J. P. Morgan and Company, and a Trustee of the American Museum, was financially responsible for the whale model Jimmy Clark and I had built. In those days, and, as a matter of fact, until the depression of 1930, being a Trustee of a public institution was an expensive honor. . . .

It was Mr. Jesup, I think, who had told Mr. Bowdoin that a collection of whales was a necessity for the American Museum and that it was up to him to do something about it. Apparently whales were about the last thing Mr. Bowdoin wanted to do anything about, but he had come across like a little man to the tune of ten thousand dollars. He was, however, frightfully embarrassed and seemed to be afraid of being laughed at by his friends who were giving Rembrandts and Van Dycks to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I overheard him remark to the Director one day:

"When Morgan comes back from Europe he'll say, 'My God, George, what in hell do you want with whales?'"

But Mr. Bowdoin's ten thousand dollars was God's gift to an enthusiastic young man even though it did embarrass the donor. It not only made possible the whale model on which I had won my spurs, so to speak, but the Amagansett whale as well. Also it launched me on a career of blubber and brine which lasted for eight years and carried me twice around the world.

I had become so keen about whales that after the Amagansett skeleton was cleaned, I begged the Director to be allowed to describe it. This was my first scientific paper and when it came off the press I was as proud as though I'd given birth to quintuplets. In describing the skeleton it was necessary to use a lot of impressive technical language, and so I felt that I had become a real scientist at

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last. It was a pretty good paper at that, for although these particular whales had been killed for centuries, no trained scientist ever had been on the spot when a specimen was fresh. Study of the whale literature also made it clear that almost nothing was known about the habits of the beasts. Whalers knew how to kill them and had described that well enough. But when it came to really accurate knowledge of their life histories, the books were full of fantastic yarns. There never was a more virgin field for an enthusiastic young naturalist.

WHALING stations had been established on the west coast of Vancouver Island and southeastern Alaska. The great beasts were hunted from little ninety-foot steamers, killed with an explosive harpoon, towed to the factories on shore and there converted into oil and fertilizer. Knowing that some of Mr. Bowdoin's ten thousand dollars was left, I figured I might use it to advantage if the Director could be made to see it my way. It didn't take much persuading when I told Dr. Bumpus I was willing to go without salary. If he would risk a possible thousand dollars of Mr. Bowdoin's money I'd guarantee to bring him some results—or else!

Thus it came about that in the spring of 1908 I set out on my first real expedition equipped with notebooks, field glasses, tapes and measuring lists and, most of all, a Graflex camera. That instrument represented the winter's saving from my salary which had been increased to one hundred dollars a month. This put me in the big money. Jimmy Clark was getting ready to go to Africa as a volunteer assistant to the English naturalist-photographer, A. Radcliff Dugmore, and we had worked on photography all winter.

Victoria, Vancouver Island, was where I had to sell my plans and myself to the Pacific Whaling Company. Victoria slept peacefully in the sunshine while the spring days drifted into summer. About it there was a delightful air of being on the edge of a great wilderness, which, indeed, it was. At that time parts of the Island's interior were almost unexplored and one saw in the shops magnificent wapiti and deer heads, bear skins, totem poles, and baskets from the coastal Siwash Indians.

Twenty miles up the great gash which Barclay Sound cuts into the west side of Vancouver Island, the whaling factory huddled against a fir-clad mountain. I came to it on a little coastal steamer, weak from seasickness. We had battled a terrific storm all night and I had my first experience with what was to become a major problem during all my whaling days. Eventually I recovered permanently and now no storm makes the slightest difference to my semicircular canals, but with the irony of fate it came too late. In thinking back over a somewhat adventurous life, my considered opinion is that nothing I have ever done required more unadulterated guts than going out on those tossing, twisting whaling vessels with the certain knowledge that I would suffer the tortures of the damned. Often I was so weak that I lay on the deck behind the harpoon gun like a dead thing and only when one of the sailors lifted me to my feet and hooked my arm about a stay could I work the camera and take my notes.

But dogged persistence, of which, God knows, I now would be incapable, drove me out on the whaling ships to do my work. With nothing to distract my mind except a heaving stomach, I could time how long whales remained at the surface when feeding, how often they blew, how they used their flippers and flukes and a hundred other details which no whale hunter had time to note in the heat of battle.

Never will I forget the first time a whale came up beside the ship. The water was without a ripple and I saw it rising twenty feet below the surface—a huge ghostly shape

driving swiftly upward until it erupted like a submarine volcano almost beneath my feet. I could look down into the cavernous nostrils as they swelled out and shot a geyser of hot stinking vapor into my face. A second later the crash of the harpoon gun sent me reeling backward. Crawling to the rail I had a momentary glimpse of a great tail rising and falling in a smashing blow that could have crushed our little boat to splinters. Then dead quiet except for the slow rattle of the rope as the lifeless body sank straight down into the blue depths. Several times it happened before I could steel my nerves to think and act. Then with my face pressed into the camera hood I waited to press the button till the phantom body showed in the mirror.

THERE was the fascination of wondering what went on beneath the surface when we hunted a school of whales. Often I saw them feeding quietly, then at some signal, heave their vast bulks into the air and disappear at the same instant. They might double and reappear behind the ship breaking water in line like a company of soldiers marching on parade. How did they communicate with each other? It is not given us to know and I doubt if it ever will be. How, too, can they descend to depths where the water pressure would crush the steel sides of a submarine like an eggshell and return to the surface a few moments later with the rush of a leaping salmon? Too rapid emergence is the terror of the deep water diver, else his body is twisted and racked by the deadly "bends." Something like eight hours for decompression is, I believe, required for a dive of three hundred feet; or, at least, it was before my adventurous friend Captain John Craig showed that helium could be mixed with oxygen and cut the decompression period amazingly.

It was positively indecent the way I pried into the private lives of whales during those days at sea. With field glasses from the masthead, I watched the love-making of a pair of humpback whales fifty feet long. An amorous bull whale may be very amusing to us but to his lady friend he is doubtless as exciting as a matinee idol is to a debutante. In this particular case the gentleman whale executed a series of acrobatic performances evidently with the object of impressing the female. He stood on his head with the tail and fifteen feet of body out of water. The great flukes were waved slowly at first; then faster until the water was pounded into spray and the terrific slaps on the surface could be heard a mile away. This performance ended, he slid up close to the female, rolling about and stroking her with his right flipper. She lay on her side apparently enjoying his caresses. Then he backed off and dived. I thought he had left her for good but she lay quietly at the surface; she knew full well that he would not desert her—yet. He was gone for, perhaps, four minutes, then with a terrific rush he burst from the water throwing his entire fifty foot body straight up into the air. It was a magnificent effort and I was proud of him. Falling back in a cloud of spray he rolled over and over up to his mate, clasping her with both flippers. Both whales lay at the surface, blowing slowly, exhausted with emotion.

I felt embarrassed to be spying on their love-making like a Peeping Tom but the Captain was made of sterner stuff. The exhibition left him cold. His materialistic mind visualized the thousands of dollars their carcasses would bring in oil and fertilizer to the exclusion of all else. From the mast head I pleaded with him to "have a heart" but without avail. The ship slid closer and closer to the half slumbering lovers and a bomb-harpoon crashed into the side of the amorous bull. Half an hour later the lady, too, was killed for she refused to leave the vicinity of her dead lord.

I suppose I am the only naturalist who has ever been present at the birth of a baby whale. One day a big female finback was brought to the station, obviously in an "interesting condition." The Captain told me he had killed her only a few miles from shore where she was probably seeking quiet water for the accouchement. Wire cables were made fast about her flukes and as the steam-winch drew the sixty-ton body out of the water the baby was born right before our eyes. It was twenty-two feet long and would weigh about fifteen tons; the mother measured sixty-five feet. Of course the reason why the babies are so proportionately large is because whales live in a supporting medium.

Milk was oozing from the teats of the whale and I drew off a pailful just like milking a cow. The taste was not good but it was so strongly impregnated with the gases of decomposition that not much of the original flavor was left.

Absolutely nothing was known about the breeding habits of whales so I went into the study in a big way. The uterus of an eighty-foot sulphur-bottom is about as large as a double bed and hunting for an embryo is a messy job. By recording the size of each fetus and the dates, it became evident that there is no regular breeding season for whales although the "joys of spring" seem to have a slight effect upon their love making.

Some years later the British Government became worried about the rate at which whales were being killed in the South Atlantic. They wanted to enact laws to protect them during the breeding season. Would I please tell them when whales bred? It seemed as simple as all that but my records of pregnant females showed that they couldn't impose blue laws or birth control on a bull whale. By the same token if they put a ban on the human hunters no good would come of it. We can never know whether or not whales have any constancy in their marital relations. But with the whole ocean to roam in, I should judge that free love was the order of their lives. Still, their great hearts, as big as an office safe, do know the tender feelings of affection—at least mother love, as I have seen many times.

How large whales nurse their young is still a mystery. The two teats on either side of the genital opening are only about two inches long. The young whale's lips are six or seven inches thick and the snout is pointed. Unless the babies nurse with the teats above the surface it seems inevitable that more sea water than milk would enter their stomachs.

These new facts of life history and many more were learned during my stay at the whaling station in Vancouver Island and Alaska. A hundred large whales of three species were measured, photographed and described and by the time I returned to New York more new data had been accumulated in my notebooks than had ever been gathered about any group of water mammals in the same length of time. The reason, of course, was because I happened to be the first naturalist to study whales at sea with the unequalled opportunities which shore stations presented. Moreover, at the Barclay Sound factory I had roughly cleaned and prepared for shipment the skeleton of a humpback whale, so the trip represented an actual specimen as well as factual data.

AFTER returning from the St. Lawrence, I expected to settle down for a summer of hard work in the Museum. But, in less than a month, the Director called me to his office. "Would you like to go to Borneo and the Dutch East Indies?" he asked. Would I? Would I like to go to Paradise?

For answer I almost leaped out of my chair. It was ridiculous to ask me if I wanted to go anywhere. I wanted to go *everywhere*. I would have started on a day's notice for the North Pole or the South, to the jungle or the desert. It made not the slightest difference to me.

"The U.S. Bureau of Fisheries have asked if I would lend you to them to go on a cruise of the exploring ship *Albatross*. They want to investigate the small islands of the East Indies and do deep-sea dredging. Your job will be to study the porpoises. Doubtless, there are many new species to be discovered. No one has done it. Also you are to collect land mammals and birds wherever possible. Better look up the ships at once. The northern route from Seattle will be the quickest."

It was all very matter-of-fact to him, but I went out walking in a dream. In the first place, the *Albatross* was the most famous ship of her kind afloat. No other exploring vessel was so well equipped for deep-sea dredging and her personnel had included some of America's most distinguished naturalists. To be numbered in that group was sufficient in itself even without the prospect of voyaging among the enchanted islands of the East Indies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TYPHOON

THE *Albatross* steamed southward from Manila, through the Sulu Sea, with only a momentary stop at Twao, British North Borneo, and then on to Sibattik Island for coal. It was a breathless day of torrid heat when she dropped anchor in Sibattik Bay. I can see in memory the sheer wall of jungle; the giant camphor wood and "king trees" stretching up and up till their summits seem to touch the sky; the palms and creepers and ropes of vines, bristling with thorns like the barbed-wire entanglements of a battlefield. I can hear the myriad singing insects which filled the air with such a medley of shrill vibrations that my ear drums ached. Then at four o'clock in the afternoon all was still. Utter silence lay over the jungle while great billowing clouds rolled swiftly in from the sea, and torrents of rain poured out of the sky. Abruptly, the deluge ceased, to leave the jungle steaming like a caldron. Then the insects began again, shrilling louder than before, and the forest creatures took up their separate lives where they were interrupted by the flood of rain.

I remember, too, my first attempt at moving through the jungle. I tried to force my way—but once only. Thorns and barbs caught and held me in a dozen places; "wait-a-bit" vines laced my chest and dug deep into my arms and legs. Every move was agony. There was nothing to do but detach them one by one and cut my way to freedom.

A surprise of the present war is how armies have been able to fight in the jungles of the East. I remember talking years ago to British officers about the defense of Singapore. To the land side they merely waved their hands and smiled.

"There is the jungle! It's better than any man-made fortification; no troops could move through that."

It seemed so at the time, and yet the Japs did it. They slithered through the tangle of thorns and creepers with the lizards and pythons, like some loathsome half-human creatures born of the primordial slime, each one cutting his own path, worming his way behind the British lines. The jungle didn't stop them, nor the fever, nor the leeches. Swarming on the leaves, in the bushes and on the ground, the blood-suckers work their way through every tear or hole in your clothing, even through the eyelets of your shoes. Moreover, the wretched creature deposits a serum which prevents the blood from coagulating. The wound stays open and is certain to become infected; then you have a nice mess.

All my life I have loathed snakes; I have to force myself to touch them and yet I have injected and brought back hundreds for the Museum. Of course, I supposed there would be dozens of snakes in the jungle and duti-

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fully I did try to find them, but the vegetation was so thick and many of them are so protectively colored that they eluded me completely. There was, however, one shining exception. I was following a deer trail with my Filipino boy, Miranda, when suddenly he jerked me violently backward.

"Excuse, Master, but right there, big snake. You shoot him, quick."

He pointed and I looked, but to no avail. I couldn't see any snake. A great tree overhung the path and he kept saying "There, there, don't you see him? Right on that branch."

Suddenly a breath of wind shifted the leaves and a patch of sunlight filtered down to rest upon a glittering eye, in a great flat head pressed upon the branch. Following it back I made out yards and yards of snake stretched along the tree trunk, poised to drop upon anything that moved. I backed off and lined my sights upon that shining eye. At the crack of the rifle, a typhoon seemed to have struck the jungle. A writhing, twisting mass of flesh and muscle mowed down bushes, crushed small trees and wrapped itself in a mass of thorn vines and creepers. Miranda and I ran. At a safe distance, we watched until the storm quieted, then cautiously ventured back. The snake lay there, still jerking spasmodically, looped and coiled upon the ground. The head was smashed to a pulp, and when we straightened the reptile out I paced the length. It measured twenty feet. The stomach was empty and the great serpent must have been very hungry. It was lying above the game trail ready to throw its coils about anything that passed below. Without doubt, Miranda's sharp eyes had saved me from a horrible death.

FROM the first light of dawn until far into the night, I was busy. The ship's doctor advised me to rest as others did during the heat of midday. But, in the enthusiasm of youth, I laughed at his warning until one afternoon when the temperature was one hundred and twelve degrees in the shade. Then, suddenly, I dropped under a palm tree in the steaming jungle. Black patches darted before my eyes and I was violently ill. It was only a heat stroke, caused by too much exertion in the heat and too little sleep, but it gave me pause. From then on, I did my shore-work in the early morning and late afternoon, spending the broiling hours of midday in the laboratory preparing specimens.

Because the *Albatross* had explored the sea bottom from the Philippines to Borneo, she did no hydrographic work until we crossed the Celebes Sea. In those waters, blue as indigo, she dropped her nets sometimes a mile, or even two, straight down to the ocean floor. Usually the dredge contained a great mass of ice-cold mud, but as this was washed away strange sea creatures began to appear from out the muck. Animals from the complete darkness of a submarine life where the water pressure was enormous were dragged to an upper world for which they were not adapted. There were fish with eyes far out on stalks; others bearing phosphorescent spots along the sides like the glowing portholes of a lighted ship; fish carrying little lanterns in front of their noses to light the way. Sometimes in the sudden ascent to the surface and release from the terrific pressure they were turned almost inside out. Usually those from the greatest depths were badly damaged.

My job, of course, was land collecting and I was supposed to have no part in the dredging operations. But I could not stay away from the forward deck when the net came up from those mysterious depths. Always something appeared which set my imagination aflame. One day there was the figurehead of an ancient ship from the deepest part of this romantic sea. Made from the trunk

of a great tree, it was fashioned in the likeness of a woman with streaming hair. So covered was it with barnacles that at first we thought it merely a water-soaked log and of no account. But I seemed to catch the shape of something human under the crust of sea life and with a chisel and a hammer cut away the barnacles that had bit deep into the solid oak. Gradually there emerged a woman's form, her outstretched hands clasped before the full breasts which still retained the shape of youth. How old it was or from what ship it came, there was no way of telling, but assuredly it was not of recent time. For a hundred years, or for centuries perhaps, it had rested on the ocean floor until our net dragged it from the eternal deep. What, I wondered, was its history? Had it graced the bow of a Spanish ship sailing in quest of the riches of the Indies? Or was it English, or Portuguese, or Dutch? Had the ship been lost by storm or sunk in battle?

For a week I kept the lady we had rescued from the sea. I wanted to take her home with me, to learn more of her history, if I could, from those who knew the story of ships and figureheads, but she was too big to save. I could not take her to my cabin for there would have been no place for me, and the quartermaster complained of her presence on the forward deck. To him she was just a log of wood and in the way. So I nailed upon her body, just beneath the breasts, a lead plate with my name, address, and date, and a plea that if she were found again I would be informed. Then from the afterdeck I consigned her to a new grave in the Molucca Sea. Perhaps now she is resting beside the bones of our own American men and ships, for it was there that a great battle was fought with the Japanese in 1942.

As I think back to those lovely tropic islands bright with flowers and graceful palms floating like giant lilies on a sea of incredible blue, in peace unutterable, it seems beyond belief that only a few short months ago they could have echoed to the crash of cannon and the screams of dying men.

Menado, our first port after Borneo, was pure enchantment, a town made for exhibition, it seemed, not for use. It rests sleepily on the long arm which the Island of Celebes stretches northward toward the Molucca Passage. The harbor is only a semicircular bite out of the land and we were told that at times a tremendous swell rushes in from the Celebes Sea. But when the *Albatross* dropped anchor just at dawn, the water was as smooth as glass, mirroring a shore line of feather-like bamboos and lacy palms. The volcano behind the town stood out sharply in silhouette against a sky of vivid orange-yellow shot through with streaks of crimson. At the end of the long wharf, we stepped into a picture-book village. Wide streets lined with magnificent trees, perfect little houses, velvet lawns, and gorgeous beds of flowers. Roads which seemed to have been newly swept. Natives in brilliant sarongs and scarlet fez. Everything scrupulously neat and clean; "Spotless town" if there ever was one.

It was a happy place. I sensed it from the natives who gave me a brilliant smile and courteous greeting to the pleasant-looking Dutchmen on their way to offices shortly after sunrise. In mid-morning, they retired to the coolness of shaded verandas and darkened bedrooms, there to sleep away the hours of heat. The streets were deserted save for a few brown-skinned natives. About five o'clock in the afternoon the white population bestirred itself. Women in filmy dresses and men in white duck clothes gathered at the club or drove about the streets until the soft darkness of the tropic night dropped like a stage curtain, shutting out the palms and flowers. But it didn't send them off to bed. Night was the time in which to live; the day for sleep.

We saw a dozen towns throughout the Indies all similar to Menado. Amboina, Gorontalo, Macassar, Ternate,

Gillolo—they all gave the same picture of beauty, of cleanliness and of a happy people drowsing away the hours while the peaceful days went drifting by.

During the past thirty years, I have talked often of these little towns, but to everyone they sounded vague and far away. Never did I find a soul who had walked their flower-bordered streets and few who even knew their names. Then, less than half a year ago, I waked one morning in New York to see the word Menado blazing across the front of every paper. My tiny village at the end of the earth suddenly had become of world importance. Only the day before, Japanese planes had rained death and horror upon its quiet beauty and its gentle people. Out of the skies chattering, blood-thirsty little men, clad in khaki and steel, had dropped into its shaded streets and crawled about its gardens like a swarm of loathsome maggots.

Menado's name had hardly left the front pages of the world's press before that of Amboina took its place. The *Albatross* dropped anchor there on December 4, 1909, and today I read in my journal how after we had landed at the long wharf, I went up a deep canyon collecting birds and small forest animals. A flock of hornbills flew overhead "making a noise exactly like airplanes" I recorded. I shot a huge lizard lying on a branch over a deep pool from which I collected several fish of a new genus. And then in the late afternoon, it says that I climbed to the top of a hill where the bay and town lay spread out before me "like an aerial photograph."

While I was sitting there, loving the view and the trees and flowers, a caravan of ants crawled over my legs. I'd never seen any ants like those and I cracked one between my teeth for that is a good way to identify them quickly. The sharp acid taste was distinctive, so with a pair of forceps from my collecting bag I picked some off my legs and put them into a small bottle of alcohol. They went to Professor William Morton Wheeler at Harvard University. It represented, he said, an unknown species and he named it in my honor. I hope my ant helps to make life miserable for the Japanese who are now using Amboina as an air base from which planes roar out on errands of destruction over the Moluccas and the Banda Sea.

ON the mountainous island of Buru, but partially explored, we met the only unfriendliness from natives. The Governor at Ternate had warned us about Buru, but when we landed, there was not a single native visible. I went far inland with two sailors along the edge of a stream bed. At several places we found Malay huts, evidently hurriedly abandoned, for fires were still burning and food half eaten. The strange feeling that unseen eyes were peering from the jungle made us definitely uncomfortable but never could we catch sight of a human being. We had been following a trail along the stream and when it was time to return I explored it cautiously. Sure enough, we found just what I feared. Sharpened bamboo stakes, probably poisoned, set at an angle along the trail, so they would jab us in the thighs. It was a Malay trick of which I had often heard. Abandoning the path, we worked down the stream bed to the shore. I, for one, was devoutly thankful to see the boat.

Every day of the cruise was filled with interest and excitement. Often I was dropped off on tiny uninhabited islands to spend a day or two while the ship dredged in the vicinity. There were new birds and animals of which I had read but never seen. We hunted the great sambar deer, as big as an American wapiti, the strange wild boar, babirusa, with tusks growing straight up through the snout, and monkeys of half a dozen species.

Christmas Day, 1909, found us in Macassar on the southern arm of Celebes. Never will I forget that day! The "Battle of Macassar," as it was known ever after in the Ward Room. The Governor invited the captain, the doctor, and myself to go crocodile hunting with him in

the morning. We divided up into three parties. I was alone and so was the doctor. I didn't get any crocodiles. I couldn't have hit one to save my life, but the doctor killed a big croc by mistake. His native paddler saw it asleep on a high bank.

"You shoot 'em in the head," he said. Dr. Lee tried to follow directions, but he wasn't at his best that morning. The bullet struck the croc in the tail and he made a wild leap off the bank, landing on the outrigger of the canoe.

Mouth wide open, he kept coming. The doctor stuck his rifle right between those gaping jaws and pulled the trigger. The back of the croc's head suddenly disappeared and the beast sank down half across the canoe.

When the *Albatross* returned to the Philippines and dropped anchor at the Cavite Navy Yard, all of us were wild to go ashore. For months we had been out of circulation and we wanted to celebrate in a big way. Every shop looked enticing, every girl was beautiful and the music intoxicating.

The *Albatross* tarried less than a fortnight at Cavite because her three-year Oriental cruise was ended. As she sailed out of the harbor, a hundred-foot homeward-bound pennant streamed from the masthead. Every ship bade us God-speed with siren whistles, each officer tossed his cap overboard, and the bluejackets set afloat a dummy on a raft bearing a placard "Good-by Manila." They fondly hoped, I was informed, that when it floated out to sea some ship would pick it up thinking that it was a stranded sailor.

Steaming northward, dredging on the way, the *Albatross* touched briefly at the southern tip of Formosa where I collected a few new birds and mammals. The little village of Soo Wan in the north was a strange place, half Chinese, half Malay, built of cobblestones right on the water's edge. Camphor was its mainstay in life. We could smell the odor far out at sea on the shore wind.

Soo Wan came near to being the last earthly port of call for the *Albatross* and all her crew, because we ran out of the bay full into a typhoon sweeping up the Formosa channel. It came with amazing suddenness, catching us when we were halfway to Keelung, forty miles from Soo Wan. In the beginning, we passed a small, low-lying British gunboat. She was only a few hundred fathoms off our port beam when I saw a man start aft presumably to hoist her colors. I was watching through my binoculars and saw a great green sea lap over her stern, sweeping the man off the deck like a straw. It was pretty awful, seeing that man disappear so quickly into the smother of white-topped waves! Neither did it help our peace of mind for we had begun to realize that the gallant old *Albatross* might end her twenty-eight years of service at the bottom of the sea right there. In a few hours, perhaps we ourselves would feel the strangling water closing over our heads. A tense calmness pervaded the ship. We were fighting a battle for life against the elements and the odds were on their side. No one talked much for it was difficult to hear above the shrieking gale and crashing water.

The *Albatross* was headed directly into the seas which broke over the bow and swept the deck every time the ship dived into one of the mountainous green waves. A mile away, sheer cliffs rose like a wall above a narrow beach, smothered in white foam. For some reason, the captain had decided to fight his way against the rising storm instead of riding it out in the open sea. Keelung was only twenty miles away, but often we barely held our own. Foot by foot, the old ship crept forward, sometimes losing more than she gained, but always coming back for another assault upon the crushing waves. There was something distinctly personal about the fight. It was man against nature. Everyone on the ship was a part of the battle. I don't think I was frightened; no one seemed to be. All our minds and hearts and strength went out

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to help the *Albatross* when she staggered drunkenly after a smashing blow in the face.

Just as night closed in, lights showed on our port bow. An hour later the ship limped through the narrow entrance of the outer harbor, battered and bruised, but game to the last. Outside the typhoon roared past, increasing in violence every minute. Next morning, during the half-hour run to the inner anchorage, the starboard engine gave way. Had that happened before we reached shelter, nothing could have saved the ship. It was because the captain knew of the weakness of that particular engine that he dared not ride out the storm on the open sea.

It required a week to make repairs in Keelung; then we went northward to the Loo Choo Islands, that "Forgotten Kingdom of the East." I photographed the ancient Shuri Palace, in Naha, where Commodore Perry made a treaty with the King of Loo Choo when he "opened" Japan in 1854. The finest red lacquer ware of the Orient is made in Naha. Some of the trays and bowls I bought there we are still using at Pondwood Farm after thirty-two years. At Nagasaki, Japan, the voyage on the *Albatross* ended for me and a new and wholly different one began on land.

A WALK through the market at Nagasaki, the day after the *Albatross* arrived, probably changed the whole current of my life. There I saw great chunks of whale meat on sale for food. I didn't know that shore whaling was being carried on in Japan and I am sure no other naturalist did. Pacific whales were virtually unknown from a scientific point of view. If I could stay to study and collect specimens it would be a ten strike both for the Museum and for me.

The meat, I was told, came from stations in the Bonin Islands and the headquarters of the whaling company were at Shimonoseki. With Paymaster Van Mater of the *Albatross*, I went there the next day. Nothing could have been more cordial than my reception by the company officials. They were, they said, delighted to have an American scientist study at their stations and I could have all the skeletons the Museum wanted. The Bonin Island season was almost ended, but they had half a dozen stations in other parts of Japan. They would send me where I could find the most whales. So I said farewell to my shipmates on the *Albatross* while she started on her long homeward voyage across the Pacific. A few days later, I was settled in a tiny Japanese hotel in the fishing village of Oshima.

My life in Japan, thirty-three years ago, might have been lived in a different country and with people of a different race, judging by the present day Japanese. Seemingly the people I knew, and liked, have no relation whatever to the inhuman creatures we are fighting in this war of horror. . . .

I watched them change year by year with amazing rapidity as they assimilated more and more Germanic ideas and *Kultur*. I saw them lose much of their courtesy and kindness, their simplicity and charm. Each time I returned to Japan, there was less that was admirable and more of those characteristics which stamp the Japanese of today with the infamy of treachery and inhuman cruelty. But in those early days, when I went to live and study at the whaling stations, I had the feeling of being an honored guest of the whole community. . . .

From Oshima, I moved to the village of Aikawa, in the north of Japan, where the whaling company had one of their biggest stations. There I lived in a beautiful little doll's house overlooking the bay to a shore line fringed with twisted pine trees. . . .

When the station at Aikawa closed in August, I had eighty tons of specimens crated and at last got them

aboard a freighter bound for Yokohama. Then I tagged along to make final shipping arrangements on a vessel sailing directly to New York. Besides the great haul of specimens, my notes and photographs held more information about whales, living and dead, than had been gathered since whale hunting first began back in the dawn of history. All this, strange as it may seem, because I was the first naturalist who had ever had the opportunity of studying Cetaceans in the Pacific with the unrivaled opportunities which the Japanese shore stations afforded. It was an absolutely virgin field and I happened along with the youth, enthusiasm, time and money to take advantage of the opportunity with which my Lucky Star presented me. . . .

I DID one job on the *Adventuress* cruise that was interesting. Dr. Hugh M. Smith, Commissioner of Fisheries, had asked me to take motion pictures of the seal herd on St. Paul's Island in the Bering Sea for the U.S. Government. No motion picture camera had ever been allowed on the island. Why, I don't know. The Bureau would give me all facilities and I could have a print of the negatives for lecture purposes. It was a real opportunity.

John Borden dropped me at St. Paul's while the yacht went southward and I was to come out on a revenue cutter which would make its last trip of the season in about three weeks. From that time until spring the community on the island would have touch with the outside world only by wireless.

During the long winter the black rocks of the Pribilofs lie deserted, stark and cold. But in the early spring the old bull seals come up from the south. Great hulking fellows they are, rolling in fat, and filled with rutting wrath. Each one selects for himself a private station on the shore, destined to be the site of his prospective harem. The best localities are those nearest the water where the females will come to land.

But just because an old bull happens to get there first does not mean that he is left quietly in possession. Far from it. He has to defend his claim against all comers. The choice sites for domestic establishments are soon gone and later arrivals either have to fight for what they want or take the back lots away from the beach. For days the shore is a roaring, bloody battlefield. Rearing on their hind flippers, the bulls throw themselves at each other, slashing viciously with their long canine teeth, shoving, pounding, tearing. Perhaps the original occupant is driven out. Then the newcomer must hold his claim in daily battles. All this is preliminary to the real show. That begins when the first soft-eyed female pokes her sleek head out of the water in the white surf line.

"The girls are here. The girls are here," roar the bulls. The beach seethes with excited swains. Modestly, the little seal ladies swim toward shore, play coyly about in the surf, draw off to deeper water, tantalizing the impatient gentlemen bouncing up and down on the rocks of their hard-won homes.

When the females finally decide to land, the fury begins. Each bull rushes for the nearest one, trying to entice her to his home site. Pushing and shoving, fighting off other aspirants for the lady's flipper, he finally drives or beguiles her to his station. Once there he has little time for love-making for other females are constantly arriving. The bull seal believes in quantity rather than quality. He never seems satisfied. His harem consists of from five to sixty and they certainly keep him busy. Each time he makes a dash to the water's edge on another amorous excursion some neighbor tries to steal a wife or two. Perhaps one of the females has been attracted by the beautiful curling mustache or deep bass voice of a bull just a few yards away. She gives him the

high sign and makes a dash for freedom while friend husband's back is turned. She may gain a new home. More often she is unceremoniously hauled back and told not to try *that* again.

The rushing season ends when the females have all arrived. Then the beach is turned into a maternity ward. Almost every lady seal gives birth to a little black squalling baby within a week of her arrival. As a matter of fact, that is what she has come for. The conceited bulls think it is their masculine charms that bring the females shoreward. They are dead wrong. It is only mother instinct. She wants her baby born in the old homestead where she herself first saw the light. She is a pretty good mother, too. Hitler would give her an Iron Cross. "One each year," is her motto and she does her duty conscientiously every spring.

But the old bull has a hard season. All through the summer he neither eats nor sleeps. It is just one long debauch of love-making and fighting and guarding his harem against unscrupulous invaders. By September he is a wreck of his former self. All his fat has disappeared for that is what he has been living on by absorption during the summer. His bones protrude, his hide is torn and scarred, he is weary unto death. Blessed sleep is what he needs. Forsaking his harem, he waddles back into the long grass, far away from the beach, there to stretch out in the warm sun. He will sleep for three weeks without waking if left undisturbed.

The little black babies don't have such an easy time of it during the summer. Many of them are crushed by their fighting fathers. Sometimes they wander a bit too far and lose their mothers. I often watched a hungry pup scramble up to a dozing female and settle down for a drink of milk. She might turn, sniff disgustedly at the youngster, and give him a slap with her flipper. None of that for her. She wasn't any public fountain. Her own baby needed all the milk she could furnish and she wasn't giving any away to stray guttersnipes. I could understand what she said just as though she spoke my own language. If the baby was overpersistent, she would get really angry, cuff him hard, and send him away squalling. Usually his own mother soon found him. I frequently saw a female seal scrambling about wild-eyed exactly like any human mother looking for her child.

"Where has Willie gone? I left him right here when I went out to fish. Willie! Has anyone seen my Willie?"

Then such cooing and gurgling when the lost had been found! She would gather the whimpering black pup to her breast, stretch out on the rocks, and let him feed to his stomach's content. The pups all looked alike to me, but every mother knew her own child right enough. Doubtless, it was by odor rather than sight.

THE pups were courageous. If I picked one up he spat and swore like a trouser, doing his best to bite with his tiny needle-like teeth. I never knew that seals had to be taught to swim. I thought they knew how to paddle instinctively, like a duck. Not so. I used to watch the mothers giving swimming lessons in the tide pools. The babies were afraid of water. They didn't want to go in at all. Slaps and vigorous cuffs were required before they would even get their flippers wet. Sometimes the mothers had to throw them bodily into the pools. But once in they learned the motions quickly enough.

Although the old bulls never left their harems, the females and the bachelors went out daily to fish. Bachelors are those seals that have not yet reached adulthood and the dignity of a harem. They are the one- and two-year-old males, and theoretically are the only ones to kill for fur. The skin of an old bull is valueless. It is too thick and heavy and too scarred by fighting.

I used to lie behind the rocks watching the seals by the hour. Their eyesight is so poor that unless I showed

myself against the skyline they seldom took alarm. When I walked boldly out on the beach there was a general and hurried exodus to the water. I arrived at one rookery where there were six thousand seals, in the midst of a terrific gale. The surf pounded in tremendous breakers upon the rocks. For hours I lay concealed, shooting bits of intimate seal life with the movie camera. Then I walked out upon the shore line. Like a church congregation standing to sing, the six thousand seals rose as one. For a few moments they gazed at me and then broke for the beach. In a living flood they poured over each other down the rocks and into the water. Riding the breakers like surf boats they floated in on the waves and out again while I ground off hundreds of feet of film. What a picture it was! Had I remained all summer I might not have got another like it.

WHEN the revenue cutter arrived I left St. Paul's. As the ship moved out of the bay every resident was gathered on the shore in a sad-faced group. It was their last contact with the outside world for many months. Day after day the ice of the Bering Sea and winter gales would pound against their rock-bound home. They had the wireless, to be sure, but no matter what happened aid could not reach them. The cemetery on the hill slope opposite the station tells its own story of those wanderers who have died a lonely death on the cheerless wastes of this bleak island. . . .

I had to decide to abandon the study of whales for land exploration. Always that had been what I wanted to do. After my first trip to the Orient, a paper by Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, in which he expounded the theory that Asia was the home of primitive man and the mother of much of the animal life of Europe and America, was always in my mind. To explore Central Asia and test his theory had gradually become almost an obsession with me. . . .

I thought it all out and then went to Professor Osborn. I wanted, I told him, to make a really scientific attack on Asia but the first expedition would work along the margin of the Central Asia plateau. It would be purely zoological, bring to the Museum valuable collections of mammals, birds, and reptiles, and incidentally teach me some of the things I needed to know before I was ready to go at the heart of the continent in a big way.

Professor Osborn was a man with great vision and a believer in young men. He was an explorer at heart, but because his life had been cast in academic halls, he did his exploration by proxy. I can think of no man in the world who has been responsible for so many expeditions. Since my idea was eventually to test his own theory which had been evolved after years of research and thought, he was more than sympathetic.

I don't remember where all the money came from. I think Sidney M. Colgate, James B. Ford, Charles L. Bernheimer, George S. Bowdoin, and Henry C. Frick gave most of it. Anyway I got it, and by March 1916 we sailed on the Japanese ship *Tenyo Maru*.

We came to Yunnan via the then little known island of Hainan and French Indo-China. At the port of Haiphong a French train took us to Hanoi, the capital, and thence through the jungle plains into the mountains of China's most beautiful province to Yunnan-fu, now called Kunming. Nine thousand feet high, near a lovely lake and blessed with the sort of climate that makes old men feel young, Yunnan-fu was a place to write home about. It was the terminus of the now famous Burma Road. Our evening clothes had been packed in moth balls but they were airing in the sun the next morning. Dinner parties, dances, and all the activities of a summer resort were the order of the day. That's what it was, a summer resort; for the wives of French officials who could not, or would not, stand the heat of the coastal plains, flocked to play in the sparkling sunshine of China's Switzerland.

There was a delay of some days in Yunnan-fu because a young and very attractive American who was to handle my financial affairs was temporarily incommunicado.

"He isn't home," they told me at his office. "He's away. He'll be back sometime. We don't know just when. No, you can't reach him. He's gone. He isn't here."

I smelled a mouse because his head office in Hong Kong, which had given me a letter of credit, said he *was* there and would be all summer. It took little snooping to discover that everyone in Yunnan-fu knew his whereabouts, which weren't far away. To be exact, he was sitting in a houseboat in the middle of the lake with field glasses glued to his eyes. All because of the beautiful wife of a French banker of Hanoi. She had come to Yunnan-fu to escape the heat and a dull husband. My "financial agent" certainly wasn't dull, nor had he been slow in making hay while the sun shone. The result was that reports of the goings on had reached the banker and in due time he arrived in Yunnan-fu with the announced intention of satisfying his honor at the point of a duel. Word of his coming had been telegraphed ahead and my agent's friends parked him out on the lake in a houseboat, with the lady and a plentiful supply of food and champagne. Moreover, a vigilante committee guaranteed that no other craft would be available for the outraged husband. In some strange French way "go betweens" satisfied his honor and he departed for Hanoi, there to divorce his wife. When the banker was safely on the train, the houseboat was wigwagged and my agent gave orders for "Anchors aweigh." A temporary bar had been hastily arranged at the dock by the welcoming committee and most of Yunnan-fu's foreign residents greeted the returning voyagers with cocktails and champagne.

Such was Yunnan-fu and many other parts of the Orient in those gay careless days. One laughed at life and death, but always one laughed. Weep, and you wept alone. It was fun if you were willing to pay the price but there was a price to pay. The tragedies came if a man, more usually a woman, thought that when the dance ended somehow, some way, one could avoid the bill.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

YUNNAN ADVENTURES

ALWAYS I have been a believer in conservation. I conserve old hats, old shoes, old pants and particularly old slippers, to the disgust, I may say, of my wife. But when we left Yunnan-fu for the wild hinterland on what is now called the Burma Road and I saw the *nth* degree of conservation by the mule drivers, it made me feel like a piker. An ingenious little basket fastened to the crupper of each plodding mule hung just where it would do the most good. Not one precious fragment of fertilizer got past the basket, and at the end of the caravan march the *mafus* counted their gains according to what had gone in and come out. This they sold when we reached a town of sufficient importance where merchants had seats on the manure exchange. If there was a depression in the market, due to the passing of many caravans, the yield was carefully hoarded until the price had risen where it could be unloaded at a profit of more than one hundred per cent. Not ninety-eight, or ninety-nine, but one hundred per cent clear profit was demanded from the hard-boiled exchange brokers.

The Chinese proverb that a "Road is good for ten years and bad for ten thousand" applied perfectly to what passed for a highway in 1916 when we traveled over its entire length from Yunnan-fu to the Irrawaddy River. It was paved with huge blocks, broken and irregular, standing up at impossible angles. Where they were still

in place they had been worn to such glasslike smoothness that one slipped and slid as though walking on ice. As a result, every caravan avoided the paving whenever it could find a path and sometimes dozens of deeply cut trails spread over the hills beside the road, only coming back to it when a ravine or impassable slope made other routes impossible. It was a highway which wound over mountain peaks, down into valleys, across rivers on swinging rope bridges and finally reached the jungle-filled plains of Burma and the Irrawaddy River at Lashio or Bahmo. How it could have been converted into a route for motor cars, God and the Chinese only know. Manpower, the one thing that China has the most of—men by the hundreds of thousands, digging like moles into the slopes, was what did it.

FOR centuries the road has been one of the main trade arteries, bringing the goods of peace from India just as in the last four years it has brought the goods of war. Marco Polo traveled over it on his trips for Kublai Khan. In his book, he describes the beautiful lake of Tali-fu and tells of a city where ducks were split, salted, and dried as in no other place in China. Sure enough, there they were, hanging in the market place, when we rode through the town seven hundred years after he had passed that way.

And on the plains near Yung-Chang where we camped, one of Kublai Khan's generals, Nestardin, he says, fought a great battle with the King of Burma in 1272. There, for the first time, the Mongols saw elephants. Their horses were terrified and bolted into the woods but Nestardin knew that the strange creatures must be made of flesh and blood. So he ordered his men to tie their ponies to the trees and advance on foot, shooting clouds of arrows at the elephants. Bristling like pin cushions, trumpeting with pain, the great beasts dashed away, throwing the King's troops into confusion and giving victory to the Mongols. Over this same road, Nestardin brought back dozens of elephants to the court of the great Khan where they were used in his armies ever after.

Less than a hundred years ago the road was slippery with blood when the Chinese turned against the Mohammedans who had come over it up from the south and slaughtered them like sheep. But when we were there, it was a road of peace and the ordinary affairs of life. Pigs, chickens, horses, and cows lived in happy communion with the human inmates of the villages. The pigs, especially, were treated with the utmost favor. On the doorsteps, children played with the swine, patting and pounding them, and sometimes a mother even brought her baby to be nursed by a sow with the family of piglets.

While we were on the Burma Road we camped in temples, some of them half ruined during the Mohammedan rebellion. The priests were always glad to have us there for it meant money in their pockets and surpassing interest for their dull days.

On the ninth march there was a bandit scare when we were in a bad place, but we got ourselves to the summit of a pass where we could look down upon a caravan being robbed. Right below us the brigands were ripping open packages and scattering their contents right and left. There were forty of them. I could easily have killed half a dozen, but it wasn't our show. My motto, while traveling in the Orient, has always been to keep my hands out of other people's business, particularly where bandits are concerned. It has saved a lot of trouble.

At last the brigands found what they wanted, several packages of jade, and disappeared into the mountains. We learned, later, that they had been following this caravan for several days, waiting for the proper moment to attack. It belonged to a rich mandarin and the bandits knew exactly what he had among his possessions. So far

as my expeditions were concerned, I always let it be known that we carried no money or anything bandits could use except rifles, and that they were ready to be used.

From Tali-fu, almost in the center of Yunnan, we left the Burma Road and traveled far into the north even into the borders of Tibet where the wild aboriginal tribes lived in secluded mountain valleys, still using cross-bows and poisoned arrows. Wherever we went we searched for animals—big mammals, small mammals, rats and mice and shrews, and birds, frogs, reptiles and fish. For this was a zoological expedition pure and simple for the purpose of bringing back to the American Museum a cross section of the animal life of this little-known region.

From Li-chiang, a frontier village with a curious mixture of Chinese, Tibetans, Mosos, and half a dozen other tribes, we rode straight to the Snow Mountain which rises twenty thousand feet above the sea. Below the summit in a grassy meadow beside a stream of green snow water, our tents were pitched just at the edge of the spruce forest. Then we climbed to the grassy slope above the timber line to set a hundred traps in the runways of meadow voles and under logs and stumps in the forest. Our Moso hunters, with their dogs, slept in their ragged clothes, without a blanket or shelter of any kind, beside a huge rock.

It was, I think, the most beautiful camp I have had anywhere in the world. Above our heads, silhouetted against the vivid blue of a cloudless sky, towered the great Snow Mountain, its jagged peaks crowned with gold when the light of the waning sun touched their summits. As we sat at dinner that night about the fire, and the light faded, we could see the somber mass of the forest losing itself in the darkness and felt the unseen presence of the mighty peaks standing guard over our mountain home.

WE were awakened by our Boy's long drawn call to the hunters, "*L-a-o-u H-o, L-a-o-u H-o.*" It was a cold, gray morning with dense clouds weaving in and out among the peaks, but nevertheless I decided to try for goral, the Asiatic counterpart of the European chamois. It would be a new animal to add to my list of big game. Two of the men took the pack of mongrel dogs around the base of a high rock shoulder, sparsely covered with scrub spruce, while I went up the opposite slope accompanied by the other two. In half an hour the hounds began to yelp and we heard them coming around the summit of the ridge in our direction. The Moso hunters made frantic signs for me to hurry up the steep slope but in the thin air at fourteen thousand feet my heart was pounding like a trip hammer and I could move at only a slow walk. Suddenly the dogs appeared on the side of a cliff just behind a bounding gray form. The mist closed in and we lost both hounds and animal, but ten minutes later a blessed gust of wind swept the fog away and the goral was indistinctly visible with its back to the rock, facing the pack. The big red leader now and then rushed in for a nip at the animal's throat, but was kept at bay by its vicious lunges and sharp horns.

It was more than two hundred yards away, but the cloud was drifting in again and I dropped down for a shot. The first two bullets were low, but for the third I got a dead rest over a stone and at the roar of the little Mannlicher the goral threw itself into the air, whirling over and over onto the rocks below. The hunters, mad with excitement, dashed up the hill and down into the stream bed. When I arrived, the goral lay on a grassy ledge beside the water. Then began the ceremonies which must be performed at the death of the first animal in every hunt. One of the Mosos broke off a branch, placed the goral upon it and at the first cut in the skin chanted a prayer. Laying several leaves one upon the other, he sliced off the tip of the heart, wrapped it care-

fully and placed it in a near-by tree as an offering to the God of the Hunt.

All of our Moso hunters, except one, were armed with cross-bows. They were remarkably good shots and at a distance of a hundred feet could put an arrow into a six-inch circle four times out of five. The one man who did not carry a cross-bow boasted of a most extraordinary gun. Its barrel was more than six feet long with the stock curved like a golf stick. A powder fuse projected from a hole in the side of the barrel and just behind it was a forked spring. At his waist, the man carried a long coil of rope, the slowly burning end of which was caught in the crooked spring. When he wished to shoot, the native placed the butt of the weapon against his cheek, pressed the spring so that the burning rope's end touched the powder fuse, and off went the gun. I tried it once, but never again; my face was sore for a week!

The first goral hunt was a pattern of the many hunts we had for serow, goral, muntjac, and other strange animals on the Snow Mountain and in the wild country along the Tibetan frontier. They were interrupted, however, for more than a month, by a severe infection in the palm of my hand from which I almost died. We had gone down to a temple at the base of the mountain when my hand suddenly began to swell. Twenty days' ride from a doctor, there was nothing to do but treat it myself with steaming cloths, during intervals of delirium. My arm swelled to twice its size, but eventually the poison subsided and I was well again, though my hand was useless for many weeks.

After leaving the Snow Mountain village, we pitched our tents on the banks of the "White Water" and later on the "Black Water" near a deep canyon of the mighty Yangtze where no man had ever been.

I remember, particularly, the day when we crossed a pass sixteen thousand feet high into the Yangtze drainage basin. In a few hours we climbed out of the warm October sun into the dead of winter. Up through a larch forest into the higher belt of dwarf bamboo, beyond the uttermost timber line of rhododendrons, to the summit of the pass, bare and bleak and frozen. A bitter wind swirled about our tents. It was too cold to sleep. All night we shivered about a tiny fire for there was little wood. Three of the ponies died from cold and the effects of the altitude. All of us suffered severely and it was a miserable party that descended next morning into the golden sunshine of the October we had left so suddenly.

Every mountain range brought us into new valleys occupied by strange aboriginal people. There are thirty distinct tribes in Yunnan, the remnants of the original inhabitants of China. Just as the white men pushed the American Indians westward, so did the Chinese drive the aborigines south and west centuries ago. Now they are concentrated in the mountains of Yunnan. One of them, the Lolos, never have been subdued by the Chinese. They still occupy a territory called Lolo Land in Western China where no Chinese is allowed to pass.

Small bands of Lolos have wandered from the forbidden country and settled in Yunnan. After crossing the pass, we came down to a Lolo village hidden away deep in a secluded valley. Fine, tall fellows they were, with long heads, high-bridged noses, and thin lips and faces almost Caucasian in type. They never had seen a white man and at first were frightened. Tobacco and small presents soon made them realize that we were friends.

Everything about us was interesting to them. Cameras, watches, and the like were too far beyond their comprehension to be impressive, but the field glasses seemed a miracle; also my high-powered rifle and revolver were tools of a god, for their own guns were primitive matchlocks with a range of only thirty yards. In photographs, they could not recognize themselves. It was only by pointing to some special article of dress and indicating it in the photograph that they could be made to understand.

Under a Lucky Star, by Roy Chapman Andrews 61

Passing through the Moso country, up to the frontier of Tibet, we went, finding new mammals and birds, new plants, new tribes, and unmapped trails. Then across the Yangtze into the Mekong gorge and southward to the steaming tropics of the Burma border. Thick palm jungle instead of snow-capped peaks; leopard, tiger, sambar, and monkeys; peacocks, jungle fowl, and half a dozen other pheasants. A country as different from that we had left as Cuba is from Alaska.

THE Salween River valley lay between us and Bhamo. I wanted to go there, but hesitated, wondering whether it was worth the risk. A ghastly place it is, deserted of all human life, given over to peacocks, leopards, and wild red dogs. Even the aboriginal Lisos dared not face the malignant malaria which makes the valley a fever-stricken hell. It was here that Stilwell's Chinese troops fought the Japanese only a few months ago. . . .

I decided to go to the Salween even though we were flirting with death, for other collectors had avoided it like a plague spot and I knew that whatever mammals we obtained would be new to science. . . .

A few weeks later, while hunting the black gibbons of Ho-mu-shu, I had a terrifying experience. We were camped on a sharp mountain spine, less than a hundred yards wide. The sides fell away for thousands of feet in steep forest-clad slopes and as far as our eyes could reach, wave after wave of mountains rolled outward. . . .

While the tents were being pitched, the forest suddenly resounded with a wild "*bu-wa, bu-wa, bu-wa!*" We grabbed our shotguns and dashed down the mountain side, slipping, stumbling, falling. Going forward only when we heard the monkeys call, we were still a hundred yards away when a huge black gibbon leaped out of a treetop just as I stepped from behind a bush. He saw me instantly. For a full half minute he hung suspended by one long arm, his round head thrust forward staring intently; then launching himself into the air as though shot from a catapult, he caught a branch twenty feet away, swung to another and literally flew through the treetops. Without a sound save the swish of branches and splash after splash in the leaves, the entire herd followed him down the hill. We returned to camp wiser in the ways of the gibbons of Ho-mu-shu.

Two days later we were sitting on a bed of fragrant pine needles, watching a squirrel, when the crazy laughing call of the gibbons sounded from across a deep ravine. A swirl of leaves showed us where they were and as one big fellow swung out on a branch with one arm, I knocked him off with a bullet from my rifle. A brown female ran up the tree trunk a few seconds later and peered down where the first monkey had fallen. I dropped her, too, and the rest of the herd faded into the jungle like flitting black shadows.

A clean wall seventy feet high fell away in a sheer drop to the mountain torrent which leaped and foamed over a chaos of jagged rocks, and separated me from the spot where the gibbons had fallen. I skirted the rock-face and had laboriously worked my way around and directly above it, when a vine stripped off and I began to slide. Faster and faster I went, dragging a mass of ferns and creepers with me, for everything I grasped gave way. Hardly ten feet from the edge of the precipice, the rifle slung on my back caught on a tiny ragged ledge and held me flattened against the cliff. How I managed to twist about and work backward, inch by inch, to safety among the trees, I only vaguely remember. At the bottom of the canyon, I felt weak and sick. It was half an hour before I could climb the mountain back to camp.

There were other hunts for goral, sambar, and leopard before we were back again on the Burma Road, working slowly southward to Bhamo and civilization. . . .

*I said to James Canterbury:
"Don't encourage him. He is
the world's greatest ham."*

FATHER said: "Play that Russian piece. I'll show you something!" The Mulraneys were gathered in the upstairs rumpus-room of the house on Eighty-ninth Street. We were all there: burly, laconic Picasso, starry-eyed El Greco, huff-and-puff Gauguin, kindly and debonair Cézanne, and the gay and gregarious Matisse, who had brought the Galts. It was one of the rare gathering of the Five Fabulous Brothers, on week-end leave from the Navy. Picasso's Karen Karel was there, and my Patsy Caspar. Mother beamed upon us all, and Father showed off as usual.

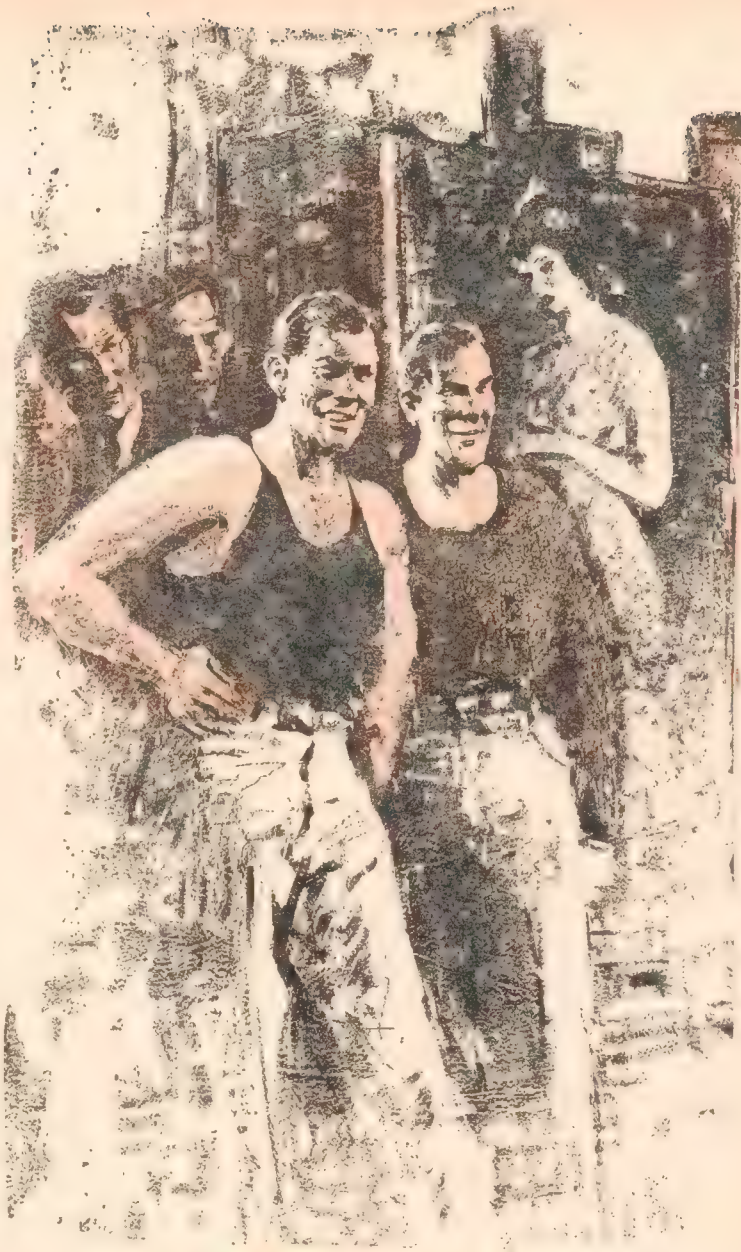
When we were children, Father started us off at everything from ballet to fisticuffs, and all the Mulraneys were champions—except me; there is always a lot of exhibitionism, when the strenuous Brothers and their even more strenuous Father foregather in a tribal melee. This afternoon Matisse and the Three Galts had just finished with an exhibition of plain and fancy tumbling and acrobatics. Fritz Galt, the top man, was an old friend who had once seen Matisse win the inter-collegiate all-around gym championship. The other two were his relatives, Herman and Helga, brother and sister fellow-Austrians. Fritz was blond and handsome; Herman was stout and rugged; Helga was rotund but had pretty legs. Matisse had joined them in many difficult stunts about the rumpus-room, and Father was wild because he had been momentarily thrust into the background while Matisse gathered cheers.

So they played the Russian piece, and Father did what he called "the Russian gazotsky," with fantastic leaps and bounds and much flinging about of his long arms and legs.

I said to James Canterbury: "Don't encourage him. He is the world's greatest ham."

James Canterbury was a large man, a newcomer to Broadway, the promoter of the revue "Merrily We Live," which revived the old vaudeville days down to the dog act and the Three Galts, and was killing them down at the Tinfoil Theater. He was coining money and very happy about it all. There was something raw and aggressive about James, but he had charm too. He said to me: "I'd like to get one of your pop's pictures. One of those 'Nudes' I hear so much about."

I said, "I'll sell you 'Nude in Railway Station' for five thousand."



The Ham

James Canterbury whistled. "Five grand! It's a lot of cabbage, Mr. Mulraney."

"People call me Tommy," I said. "Nude in Railway Station" is not one of Father's best, no matter what Father says. Being in the Coast Guard, I cannot make much money; and trading in Father's paintings is a means of feathering a nest for Patsy and me

after the war. I find they generally drift back to me, anyway, if I am alert. People like Canterbury don't hang onto paintings—they only buy them because they have money to spend, and art is ART for the time being. "I am Thomas Hart Benton Mulraney," I elaborated.

"Such names!" sighed James Canterbury. "But your Mom sure is beau-

A story of the screwball Mulraney family.
by Joel Reeve



Hangs High

tiful, and I guess it's okay to pay five grand for a picture. Send it over, huh? Now lemme get my kinkers down for the matinee. Drop in any time on the cufferoo, and get a load of the acts."

It was only about two o'clock. The dark girl with the blue eyes, who was not an acrobat, was talking to Matisse in the corner. James Canterbury

gathered in his performers and went along. Matisse said to the girl: "I'll see you later, Dolly. I'll have to change and spend some time with the family."

The girl said: "I'm not on until the second half." She had dimples and she gave Matisse the battery of them, and he went all soft and gooey. I could see it from five paces.

Matisse is quite slim and has brown curly hair, and some think he is the best-looking Mulraney. His skin is so pink and his manner so mild that truck-drivers sometimes make mistakes about him, which is how he got the scar over his left eye. That was the time Father arrived in a cut-down Ford as Matisse was taking on three of them, and did Father have fun!

But Matisse's eye was already cut when he and Father pitched in and finished the three.

I waited until the Galts had clicked their heels and bowed out with Canterbury and the dark girl, and then I followed Matisse to the showers. I said: "What makes with you and the songstress or whatever she is?"

Matty said: "Don't ask! Aint she purty?"

"Yeah," I said. "I sold 'Nude in Railway Station' to her boss for five thousand."

"You're a crook," Father shouted from behind me. "You only paid half that sum for it! Tommy, if you do not stop trading in my paintings like a horse-dealer—"

I said: "It's not a very good one, and James wouldn't know the difference if I charged him double."

Father howled: "I will not have my pictures hanging in the rooms of men of no judgment. You can't—"

I said: "If you do not be still, when I get my own house I will hang all your stuff in a bad light!" Then I ran before he could grab me. I am too small to battle him. The other Brothers are bigger and he can lick them, so I do not ever try.

PATSY and I escaped to a movie and made love that afternoon. I had to be back to stand duty with the Coast Guard the next day, and every moment was precious. Patsy is compensation for having to live with the Mulraney's. She is as wise and witty and kindly and beautiful as most people think they are.

When I came back, dinner was over. I started into the house, but in the vestibule Matisse grabbed me and said: "I've been waiting for you, Tommy."

I said: "What's the matter, Matty? You sick?"

He did not look right. His face was pale and his hand shook. He said: "Let's get out of here. The others are having a field day in there."

I could hear the noise. Father was reciting something from Shakespeare. He loves to do Shakespeare with thunder and vocal lightning. He is very bad at anything but painting the famed "Nudes," but that does not deter him one whit. I led Matisse down Eighty-ninth Street to Fifth, and we stood under one of the dim arc-lights.

He spoke very rapidly, his voice high and worried. "I went down to the Tinfoil Theater to catch Dolly's act. Just as I entered the alley—on Forty-fourth, you know—to the stage door, Dolly came out. She said she was ill, that she wouldn't go on. I was eager to take her home, of course. She lives at the Caliban House on Twenty-eighth—"

I said: "Slow down, sailor. You're swallowing your tongue. She probably hasn't got beri-beri or anything."

He said: "Wait. . . . Did you know Fritz Galt was an agent of the Austrian underground?"

"Hell, no!" I said. "That acrobat?"

"I've contributed to the fund myself. He was managing to get arms smuggled in. He knew everyone everywhere—"

I said: "Aren't you mixing up your tenses, Matty? What do you mean 'he knew'?"

Matty said: "Dolly didn't want to go home. She took me to a friend's house on Fifty-ninth Street. . . . A girl named Anna Staille. Anna was not home. Dolly seemed nervous, but not ill. We waited for Anna, but she didn't show. So we went back to the theater. . . . Tommy—Fritz was killed this afternoon. The high wire slipped, and he fell on his skull."

I said: "High wires don't slip."

"This one did," said Matty grimly. "He did his solo forty feet above-stage without a net. . . . Tommy, why did Dolly take me away from there? She wasn't really ill. . . . Tommy, I'm scared."

I thought a minute. I said: "What do we know about it? Just that someone who knew you were coming to the theater did not want you there—probably because of your knowledge of the act and of acrobatics in general. . . . How about Herman and Helga?"

"Herman wasn't in on the secret business, I don't think," said Matisse slowly. "He is not very bright."

I said: "What about the police?"

"They think it was an accident," said Matisse. "You know, I couldn't talk with them. You know how Father is about cops."

It was true that Father did not care for policemen. His idea was that his six sons were police force enough for Mulraney affairs. Of course Father is a man of rank prejudices, but in some of them it is better to humor him. He claims that although all cops are strictly not stupid, that most of the stupid men he has met have been policemen.

I said: "I'll call Patsy and tell her to come over here and wait. Then I will check down at the theater. This is none of my affair, of course, Matty. I will no doubt get into trouble—with Patsy."

"I just want Dolly Fahy to be innocent," said Matty despairingly. "I'll see you at the Tinfoil."

He fled, and I called Patsy. When I said I would be late, I was into that trouble, all right.

She said: "Every leave, you spend with a baffled Mulraney. Thomas Hart Benton, you are a louse, and a—"

I said, "I love you," and hung up. It was better so. Patsy's invective

sometimes borders on the indelicate. She wasn't like that when I met her. It came from association with Father.

I had to walk down to the Tinfoil, and it was almost curtain-time when I arrived. I went into the front office, and James Canterbury was scowling and angry. He said: "Two spots in the show gone haywire! Fahy sick, and now this thing! We kept it out of the papers, but it's bound to break tomorrow. Aint it hell?"

I said: "You're not grieving much, are you?"

"Fritz was just a Heinie," said he. "I don't like Dutchmen. That Fahy pigeon is cute, but she aint very sick. I think she is faking me. . . . How am I going to put on the show tonight with two holes in it?"

I said: "Who is Anna Staille?"

He blinked at me. His eyes were slanting, and his brows were quite black and did tricks. He said: "Lay off her. She aint for you, Tommy."

He pulled at a pair of yellow gloves on his desk. I had noticed earlier that he wore gloves although the weather was warm. He was an eccentric character, and I asked him:

"Is she your girl, James?"

"I got no girls," he said moodily.

"I just got troubles. I got to find a couple acts for this damned show."

I went out and left him with his sorrow. I went backstage and found the Galts' dressing-room. I went in, and there were Herman and Matty, each wearing white silk tights!

I said: "You can't do this, Matty! The Navy!"

"They won't know," he said defiantly. "Herman will lose his job if he doesn't go on. I'm using a wig and grease-paint. Nobody will know me."

THERE was a knock, and Helga came into the room. She said: "Der show musdt go on!" She was not very bright.

Herman said without particular enthusiasm: "Better we should show. Poor Fritz—how it happened I cannot guess!"

I said: "Did the wire break?"

"Slipped," said Herman, shaking his square head. "Somevun monkeyed with it. But who?"

I said: "You're not going to do the high wire, Matty?"

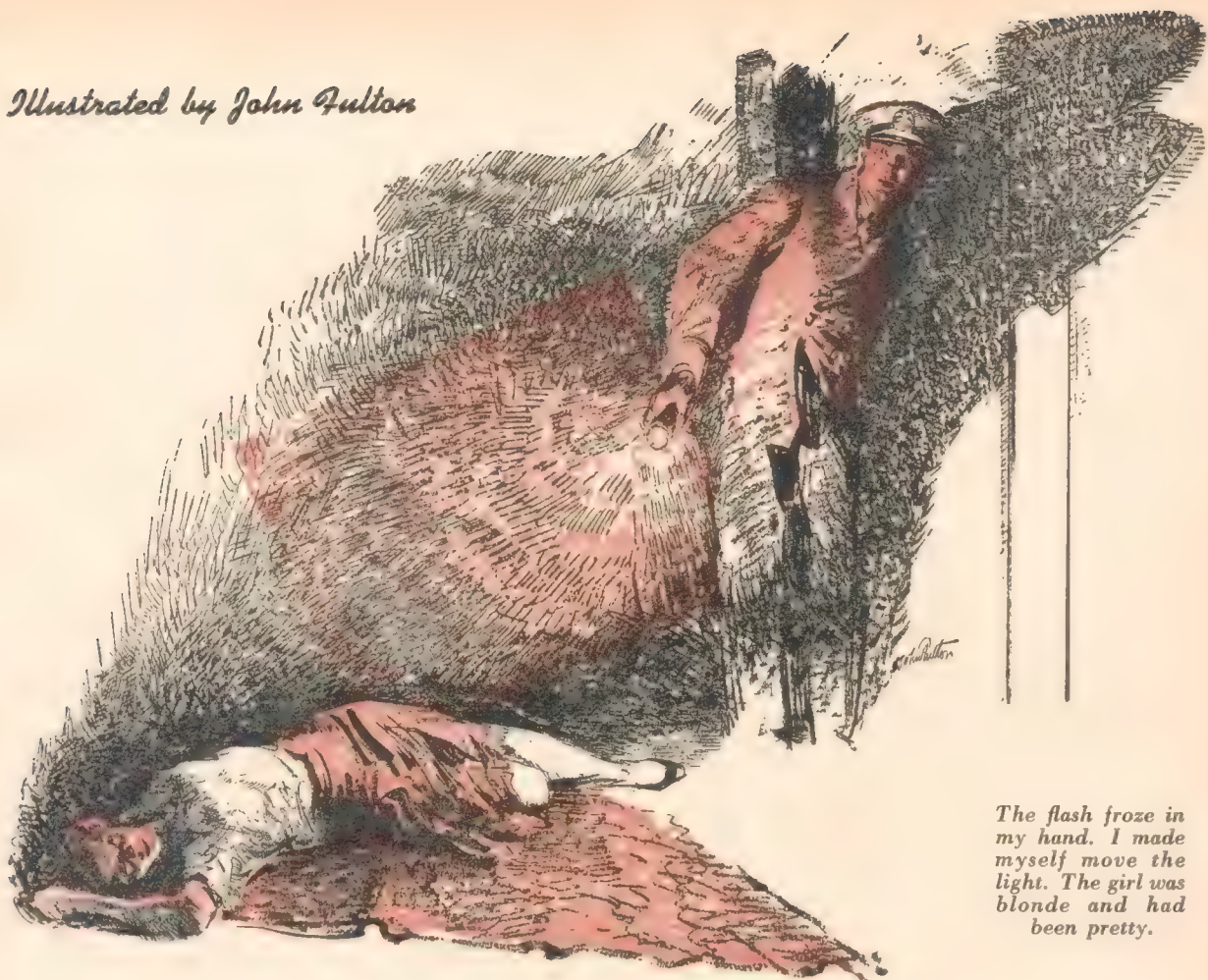
"It can't slip twice," said Matty grimly. "Herman will be watching. It's the climax of the act."

I said: "Where is Dolly?"

"She wouldn't talk to me," said Matty. "She was at her hotel, but she wouldn't talk."

"So you must make a fool of yourself," I said. But there wasn't any use in talking to him. Matty takes things out in physical action—the more dangerous, the better. That is his way, and there is nothing you can do

Illustrated by John Fulton



The flash froze in my hand. I made myself move the light. The girl was blonde and had been pretty.

about it. I fled from the room, went out of the theater, and on Broadway I caught a taxicab—a modern miracle.

I rode down to the Caliban Hotel, thinking like mad. I gave the cabby five bucks and said: "Official business. Wait for me."

I went to the desk and asked for Dolly Fahy. Her room number was 261, I noted. I slipped up the stairs and found the door and knocked. There was no answer. A chambermaid wandered along the hall, and I said sharply: "I've forgotten my key. Can you open this door?"

In the dim manner of chambermaids, she did so. I went in and looked around. There was a piece of paper on the desk, and I grabbed for it. There was a scrawl on it:

"Maybe you were right. I'm frightened. Please come and stay with me.—Anna."

I went back downstairs and gave the Fifty-ninth Street address of Anna Staille to the cabby. I was completely in the fog about the mysterious Anna. Someone at the Tinfoil Theater would know about her, but right now I

thought I might ask some questions myself. I had to get back before Matisse went into that high-wire routine.

When this war started, I was practically a child, it seemed to me then. But in the course of a few months events had conspired to age me. I felt tired, and my head ached. I kept thinking about Fritz and the underground, and how awful the chances they took, operating in the midst of Gestapo agents—and I tried to use my own head in a like manner.

WE drew up in front of a brick house on Fifty-ninth, and the driver was beginning to get suspicious of my official status. I barked at him and went up the steps to ring the bell. There was no answer. I put my hand on the doorknob, and it turned.

I went into a dark hall. There was no sound, yet the house did not have the feeling of any empty building. I got out my little fountain-pen flashlight and found the stairs. Matty had said Anna Staille lived on the second floor.

There was a room at the head of the stairs. The door was half open. I went in, throwing the tiny beam of light ahead of me. There was an odor in that room, and an aura which I cannot describe but which was thoroughly horrible.

There was not a sound except the low mutter of my cab in the street below. Yet I knew I was not alone in that house. I threw the flash around. The carpet was not new and had not been well cleaned in some time. There was a stain—

The flash froze in my hand. The beam had picked out something. I stared at a small, outflung white hand. It was a helpless hand, not clenched, somehow pitiful. The full horror of being in that narrow dark house, alone and without weapons, struck in upon me.

I made myself move the light. The girl was blonde and had been pretty. She was wearing a white silk blouse which had not even been torn. Her skirt was pleated and covered her decently. She lay upon her back, and could have been asleep save that her



Matisse said: "Tommy—Fritz was killed this afternoon. I'm scared."

eyes were wide open—and if it were not for her throat.

Someone had used a very sharp instrument. She wore a scarlet neck-lace, and there was no doubt now about the stain upon the carpet. I snapped off the light and stood there shivering. Dead men upon a ship or in the ocean are one thing. This was quite another.

Leaning against the lintel of the door, I made my stomach be quiet. I was careful not to leave fingerprints. This was not a good place to be, with this dead girl. The cab-driver below could identify me. My behavior had been strange enough, dashing downtown and up, giving out five-dollar bills.

I tiptoed down the stairs. I knew I should immediately call the police but had no intention of doing so. I hesitated in the front hall. My stomach was all right now, and it occurred to me that I might examine the premises. I started for the rear of the building.

Somehow I saw the shape leaping from the shadows. It was as though I had been half-expecting it. I ducked and jumped; and instead of running away, I came inside. Therefore the blow landed on my shoulder. I thought I caught a flash of steel, and knew that this must be the murderer.

THE Mulraney's all have speed. It comes of vying together in all sorts of rough-house. I crashed my bigger and heavier assailant to the wall and tried to slam a couple into his ribs before I retreated from the threat of the knife.

He was solid. He grunted, but did not sag. I jumped out of range of his blade. He whipped out his left arm. Something clipped me on the jaw and knocked me endwise. I hit the wall and started back, ready to fight for my life.

The front door slammed. My cab motor revved up and gears clashed. By the time I got to the exit, my man had stolen my taxi and was gone.

I found a blackjack on the floor of the hall. The man had thrown it at me and escaped, rather than kill me. He was not, therefore, a demented murderer. I got out of that house and began walking back to the Tinfoil; I was in a bit of daze from the blow, I guess, but my mind seemed to work sharply enough.

I went into the front of the house and looked about. Canterbury was not in his office. The show was well launched, with a full house. While I muddled about, there was a blackout, and then came the Galts, bowing and scraping, and Matisse between them, graceful as a cat, going at once into difficult hand-balancing stunts with the muscular Herman while Helga

skipped about and pretended to be afraid they would hurt themselves. It was very corny, but Matisse was splendid and the tricks authentic and good.

Up above, high in the air, stretched the slack wire. There was no net. I stared at it, then cut around backstage, my mind whirling.

I got into the wings and saw a girl desert a peephole in the back-drop and eased over to it. I watched Herman and Matisse a moment, then shifted my gaze to the audience. I looked at the proscenium box, and nearly fell over. There sat Mother, Father, Karel, Patsy, Picasso, El Greco, Gauguin, and Cézanne. Patsy looked angry and was examining the audience below her with great care—looking for me, no doubt. But Mother and Father were staring at the stage. Trust them to recognize Matisse! If he were wearing a bearskin, they'd have known him!

Then I noticed the girl who had just left the peephole and who was lingering undecided, eying me. She was wrapped in a cloak with a high, muffling collar. I took a quick step and grabbed her in no uncertain grip. I said:

"I want to listen to you talk, Dolly Fahy!"

She said: "Matisse! He's out there!" "Because you wouldn't talk to him," I said harshly. "I want to know about Anna Staille!"

She said: "I was just going there. I stopped here on the way. . . . Something is wrong."

I said: "Who was she?"

Dolly said miserably: "She was in the show. She trained snakes. But she dropped out."

I remembered the odor in the room where Anna Staille lay, and wondered if it had to do with snakes. I said: "Was she a friend of Herman's? Or Helga's?"

"And Fritz," nodded Dolly. "Especially Fritz. I think she was also an Austrian."

I said: "One thing more: Who told you to play sick and get Matisse away from here this afternoon?"

Dolly widened her blue eyes. "Why—no one! That is, I was sick about Fritz—and Anna—and James said I could have off and maybe spend it with Matty. I was worried about Anna, you see. . . . And then I had that note, and—Anna said she was in trouble. . . . I had to get over there. But Matty called, and they didn't know I was expecting him to call. . . . And I came over here to see if he was—"

I said: "Anna is dead."

I thought she would come apart in my hands. I looked out onto the stage. I had almost forgotten about that. Matty was climbing the ladder that led to the slack forty feet up in

the air. The band was a slow march, and he was giving it that dramatic business, in time with the music. He looked fine up there, but I was scared to distraction.

I said: "There's something rotten—" "Anna—is dead?" whispered Dolly. "K-k-killed?"

I nodded, watching Matisse climb. It gave me that sinking sensation that occurs when you have socked a baseball straight at a glass window. He reached the little platform at the top and dried his hands upon a towel. The band stopped playing, and Matty examined the wire, wiping his hands again. Herman stood where the connection of wire and ratchet was made, at the bottom of a strut.

AND then the lights went out. The stage was black, except for a spot which picked out Matisse on his perch. Herman's voice boomed: "Und now our partner attempts two forwards somersaults and a full air spring!"

The band did not begin to play again. Matisse glided out upon the wire, swaying through a few of the ordinary pirouettes of the professional performer, warming up.

I said hastily: "Dolly—did Anna Staille come up from a carnival show?"

"Yes," she said through chattering teeth. "Matty! I'm frightened—he'll be killed!"

"Shut up!" I said. "Did the Galts ever slip into carny shows?"

"Yes, when James had his big one." I said: "Was Anna—was she Canterbury's girl before she took up with Fritz?"

"His wife!" she wailed. "I promised not to tell. They were divorced."

I stared at the dim form of Herman Galt. His arms were folded, but he could reach that ratchet in one step. The audience could not see him. With a performer upon the wire high above, no one would look at Herman. . . .

Matisse was spreading his arms, smiling and bowing. He was ready to begin the dangerous trick. He had done it before, I told myself, hundreds of times. He was really the best slack-wire artist in the country—Fritz himself had said so. The Wallendas had wanted him to join their circus.

I had to see what Herman was doing. For a moment all my senses strained at the husky acrobat in the darkness. Matisse was in danger,



Dolly was chattering in fear. The audience was quiet as church mice. I hoped Mother wasn't too frightened.

I released the girl, and she staggered feet away from me. I bent low, starting out on the stage under cover of the darkness, seeking Herman, making sure he did not move. I was not using my head nor the information I had just received from Dolly. I admit it. I was just another Mulraney, trying to bull it through, to get Matty safe down from there. . . .

I made one jump. It saved my life. The blow aimed at my back missed.

I heard Dolly moan and saw her running. There was a man springing at me again. Up above me, Matisse completed his second front roll on the swinging wire, gaining momentum for his air spring.

The man had a knife and was coming fast. Herman had not moved,



Father cried: "That man has a knife! Let me up there!"

but was cursing in German. I knew then that it was not Matisse who was in danger from the knife-wielding killer. It was Thomas Hart Benton Mulraney!

I knew it, and I knew why. I had been a stupid oaf for not guessing before, and for not acting upon the information just given me. I ducked another swing of the knife and ran

out under the wire upon which Matisse performed.

Of course I should have called out. There was plenty of help at hand. Someone would have turned on the lights, and the game would have ended right there. But Matty was going into his air spring. Any sudden

distraction might cause him to miss, I changed directions, and Herman reached out to grab me. I evaded Herman with ease, but the man in dark clothes was right behind me. I jumped, hit one of the guy wires.

The audience broke into sustained applause. I fell down and rolled on my back and caught a glimpse of Matty finishing his front air spring,



Canterbury braced himself. He held the knife low, glaring at Matisse.

both feet solid on the wire. I yelled, but the drums and the horns of the band were blaring and the audience was applauding, and no one heard me. Then the lights flashed up, and there I was, all dusty and crumpled, in mid-stage, with Helga and Herman bowing and trying to ignore me, and Matty sliding down gracefully to acknowledge the applause, and I could hear Father bawling: "And Tommy too!"

The curtain came down, and it was the finale of the first half, and a plaintive voice said: "Half-hour, folks! Be ready now! Half-hour for the olio."

I got up slowly, dazed. My man was gone. I started to where Dolly Fahy was leaning against a prop and she said shakily: "There, Tommy!"

I saw him then, rounding a hunk of scenery, trying to get out of the door. I made a running leap and nailed him. He thrust me off. He was very strong, and I only weigh one-thirty. I got between him and the door and saw the strange panic of utter fear in his eyes. I said: "You killed Fritz and Anna Staille!"

James Canterbury whirled about. He caught at the iron ladder leading up into the flies. He shouted: "They'll never get me! I'll never fry!"

Matisse was running toward me. He said: "He killed Fritz? Are you sure?" Herman and Helga, open-mouthed, were behind him.

I said: "On account of Anna, his divorced wife. I thought it was Nazi business. But it was just plain old-fashioned jealousy. James is an old carnny character, and believes in direct action."

Herman said: "Ja, he was backstage when Fritz fall! Ja, he hated for Anna and Fritz to be sweethearts!"

Matty went white about the lips. He said: "Fritz was my good friend!"

He put one hand on the iron ladder. Before we could stop him, he was climbing, hand over hand.

There was more confusion and the stage doorkeeper was shrill, but Father's voice boomed him down. "My sons are acting ridiculous in public. Where is that Tommy?"

They all marched in, but I wasn't looking at them. I was watching Matty, reaching the top of that ladder. There was a girder and James Canterbury was on it, running across. In Canterbury's hand was that long, sharp knife with which he had cut Anna Staille's throat.

The plaintive voice said: "Twenty-five minutes! Be ready please, folks." In front of the curtain the olio was musically going its way, as Matisse walked carelessly out on the girder.

Against the wall, Canterbury braced himself. He held the knife low, glaring at Matisse. He was desperate, cornered.

Father, staring upward, said suddenly: "That man has a knife! Let me up there!" He started for the iron ladder, but Picasso caught one arm and Gaugin the other. He gave them quite a tussle, but they are the two bulkiest brothers, and they held him. I stood close to Mother, but she did not speak nor move. She just held my hand as though I was a little kid again and she was reassuring me.

CANTERBURY sliced out with the knife. Matty said audibly: "You killed Fritz!"

"I'll kill you too, you meddler!"

Matty said: "Come and try it."

He feinted, swaying his body. Canterbury struck again. Matty pretended to lose his balance, almost falling. Canterbury rushed out to finish it.

Matisse came back erect. His hand went out and seized Canterbury's arm. Matty's slender form contracted, expanded. The knife fell, tinkling on the boards. Father exhaled and said: "There! That's better!"

Matty held his victim in a grip of steel, dragging him along the girder. Canterbury was helpless, unable to get his balance at that height. Matty got him to the middle of the stage and said: "Can't handle him. I'd better drop him here!"

Picasso and Gaugin let go of Father and went forward. Matty said, "Hold him tight!" and spun.

Canterbury turned over once. He was sailing head-first for a three-point landing. Like adagio dancers, Picasso and Gaugin bent their backs, waiting. The body was heavy, and the force terrific.

They took him at shoulder and knee. They scraped him a bit on the ground, then tossed him upward. When he came down Father was ready. He nailed Canterbury with one hand

and busted him right on the jaw with the other. He said, "Draw a knife on Matisse, will you?"

James Canterbury lay flat on the floor and did not move. Then there was a detective in plain clothes with a notebook and some uniformed cops and everyone looked at me. Father said: "Policemen! Don't waste your breath trying to explain, Tommy!"

But I told them. "First the girl—Anna Staille—you'll find her up on Fifty-ninth Street; she did not struggle. That was the odor. It was ether."

The detective said, "Are you nuts?" and they had to hold Father again while I explained.

I went on, "There was ether in Canterbury's office. I smelled it when I came back. He's a tough one, from the carnivals and he wears gloves all the time to hide his fingerprints. I will wager— He sent Dolly Fahy out to get Matisse away this afternoon when Fritz was killed and the cabby will swear he brought him away from the Fifty-ninth Street place, after he had killed Anna and tried to get me. He got scared of me, then— Her clothing wasn't even mussed, so he must have put her away before he killed her. She was his ex-wife."

The detective said: "You'll have to repeat that to a stenographer. I couldn't get it all."

Father snorted: "Cops never get anything! We pay our taxes for their wages, and they scream at honest citizens."

It was mostly on account of that cut-down Ford Father used to drive. The traffic laws were always a mystery to him and a matter of small moment. So we had to get him out of there and we did, by main strength. James Canterbury hadn't yet waked up.

When we got home, Dolly Fahy was still with us. Matty was holding her hand and petting her. Father was ogling her with all his might.

Mother and Patsy and I sat in a corner and I was explaining it all over, and how I had thought it was Herman and Helga and the Nazis, but it was only Canterbury's fiendish jealousy which had probably broken up their marriage in the first place and Patsy was saying that I could not be sure of that and pretending she did not think I might have been flirting with a girl in the "Merrily We Live" show and that that was why she had persuaded the family to attend. Father came over and jerked a thumb at Dolly and Matisse who were billing and cooing in a corner and wouldn't play with Father.

Father said, "You know what? It's a good thing Matisse is safe in the Navy. Did you see him taking all those extra bows while Tommy was rolling around in the dirt of the stage? That Matisse has ham in him!"

This story of a Wartime Marathon such as may happen tomorrow, by a writer who has himself been a prominent Olympic games contestant.

by JACKSON SCHOLZ

WHEN a man's life is suspended by a cobweb, there are precautions he must take: Steve Zeno reasoned that the best safeguard was physical and mental discipline, the constant readiness of every faculty.

Valuing his life, he was, therefore, a disciple of preparedness. He had trained himself with care, had tried to plug all dangerous chinks. The degree of his success was indicated by the present job to which he'd been assigned.

Something more acute than hearing brought to him the sound of guarded footfalls in the yard outside his window. He awoke quietly, his mind alert. He watched the pale rectangle of the window, partially shaded from the bright moonlight by foliage of a fig tree just outside. From the slant of the moon's rays he judged the time to be near midnight.

The head and shoulders of a man, standing on the ground, appeared above the window ledge.

Steve made no move—just watched quietly. He heard a cautious whisper: "Zeno!"

"Lycurgus," Steve answered in soft Greek. "Come in."

Lycurgus slid across the windowsill like a big cat. When he was in the room, Steve asked: "Something wrong?"

"I have a message." It was the voice of a young man, filled with tense excitement.

"What is it?"

"It's in writing."

Steve took a deep breath to subdue the quickening of his pulse. He could understand Lycurgus' excitement now. Written messages were rare. The usual routine stuff was transmitted by word of mouth through the elaborate grapevine system of the underground.

"Let's have it."

Lycurgus handed him the envelope. Steve took a half-burned candle from a shelf above his bed, then entered a small closet off the room. He lighted the candle, opened the envelope, and matched the few typewritten words against the code-key in his head. The hands which held the paper trembled slightly. He held the flimsy sheet deliberately until its vibration ceased. When steadiness returned, he burned the message carefully, blew out the candle, and rejoined Lycurgus.

Steve said quietly: "It's what we've waited for."

He heard an involuntary gasp of joy. "When, Zeno? When?" The voice was harsh.

"Tomorrow, midnight."

"Invasion?"

"Probably. The Rangers will come first, a large force. It sounds like the establishment of a bridgehead. They'll need time to consolidate it. That's our job, to give them time—before Nazi reinforcements can get here. We've got work to do."

Steve talked for a short time, Lycurgus making occasional indications that he understood the orders. Then he slid back through the window and merged with the shadow of the fig tree.

Steve dressed quickly. He pulled on a pair of dark blue, light-weight cotton trousers. They fitted loosely so they wouldn't bind his legs. His shirt was also dark blue, coarsely knitted. He went into it head first. It fitted snugly.

His face was tanned to a degree which made further darkening unnecessary. He pulled on his left shoe, a deceptive piece of footwear. Its tattered canvas made it appear worthless, but beneath its scabrous exterior it was firm and snug, well-made with light tough runner soles. The right shoe was even more deceiving. Before donning it, he removed a padded ramp from the inside. He would not require his limp tonight. He hid the pad beneath a loose board in the floor. It was a chance he had to take.

Once outside, he kept to the shadows carefully. What Nazi guards there were, appeared careless. They were easy to evade, and soon he had left the slumbering village of Marathon behind.

Lycurgus had gone north. Steve Zeno headed south. He would swing to the east and cover that territory on his return. His stops were frequent, secretive and brief. His organization was well-built, hand-picked, and by this time, thoroughly trained.

It had taken him eight months to prepare for just this moment. There had been no lack of help. His greatest ally had been hatred, savage, indestructible. It rode high in the eyes of every Greek, gave them a dogged courage which the barbarism of the Nazis couldn't quench. Steve left a murderous elation in his wake.

He moved with an easy tireless stride, a low-heeled jog which left the miles behind. Opponents of the re-



The

cent past had wilted behind that same stride. Steve was a distance runner, twenty-eight years old, a graduate of Dartmouth, and a linguist. He was First Lieutenant Zeno of the U. S. Army. His home was Brooklyn, his parents were naturalized, full-blooded Greeks.

He was a tall man with a loose-jointed lankiness which was deceptive. His hair was light brown, shaggy and unkempt. As an asset to his job, there was nothing distinctive about his big-boned good-natured face, unless it was his eyes, an intense blue, probing and alert. Aware of this, he kept them dull and vacuous when the Nazis were about. It wasn't too easy.

HIS rôle was that of the simple, brain-touched nephew of the local doctor, Scopas. Knowing the Nazi attitude toward mental deficients, it was a delicate act to stage, one which might easily be overdone and lead to the handling of such a case in the way



ROAD TO ATHENS

which seemed so logical to the Nazi mind.

Steve didn't overdo his idiotic grin, nor his vague response to Nazi orders. He tried to strike a compromise. He knew the German language well, but he was careful not to let this fact leak out. Ignoring the presence of the village half-wit, the Nazis often talked as if he were not there. Steve knew a lot, therefore, about the limited Nazi garrison at Marathon, a few miles inland from the coast, and twenty-two miles northeast of Athens.

Army Intelligence had placed Steve at the village after careful preparation. Steve's job had been to organize a local underground for a possible invasion. Scopas, the doctor, had been eager to cooperate, so Steve had been landed on the coast some eight months previously. He wondered, now, as he jogged along, how well he'd done his work. He'd soon find out.

He covered twenty miles that night. It wasn't hard. He had done it many

times before. He arrived home shortly before dawn, climbed through the window, and went back to bed. He allowed himself a three-hour sleep.

His rôle was harder to maintain today than it had been in the past. Excitement tried to erase the studied dullness of his eyes. Today, of all days, he must behave himself as usual, must appear as stupid as the Nazis believed him.

When he left the house again, the pad was in his shoe. He limped convincingly with the shuffling aimless gait of a man whose coordination is affected by his mental state.

TOWARD noon he went back to the Doctor's house, a four-roomed stone affair with a tiled roof. There was a low stone fence around the house. Inside the fence there were several fig trees, flower plots, and a small vegetable garden.

Doctor Scopas was an active member of the underground. As a child-

less widower, the complication of a family was eliminated. As a physician, he could move about at will, could contact almost anyone he chose. Posing as his half-wit nephew was an excellent screen for Steve.

The Doctor was not in; but when he returned, Steve had a meal of cheese, dates and salad vegetables ready for them both. Scopas was a rotund man past middle age. Kindly, nearsighted, unexcitable, he was devoted to his medicine. Even the Nazis, in their surly way, respected him. Certainly they did not suspect him of duplicity more than they suspected any Greek.

Seating himself at the table, he removed his thick-lensed glasses, polished them carefully, and returned them to his nose. This done, he said:

"They tell me, Stephen, that the moment has arrived. Are we prepared?"

Steve, sinking into his own chair, nodded. "Yes. I think we are."



"Lycurgus," Steve said in Greek. "Come in."

"Our object, of course," said the Doctor, "is to destroy all possible means of communication."

"That's the most important thing."

"What have you done?"

"I'm certain we have spotted every radio station and listening post for thirty miles each way along the coast. They will all be destroyed at the proper time. I'll take care of the radio here in Marathon myself. The telephone wires will be cut. Kyriakides and Alcemenes are established as mechanics on the Nazi staff. They have access to all motorized equipment, and will sabotage it. This should destroy all possible communication between here and Athens, the nearest point from which they can bring in reinforcements. Reinforcements will arrive next day, of course; but we should be ready for them then."

"And Mansolus?"

A tight grin stretched Steve's lips. "That part's outside my job," he said.

"But I understand that Mansolus will be here with his guerrillas. The Rangers' landing should be easy."

"It will be," declared the Doctor quietly.

Waiting was the hardest part. The afternoon dragged on interminably. Steve limped about the village in his usual aimless manner, alert for final scraps of information. So far as he could tell, the careless routine of the Nazis was unchanged.

Then he heard a motorcycle coming noisily and at high speed along the Athens road. His nerves went tight. It might be dangerously significant—or it might mean nothing, for the Nazis were a grandstand breed. They liked to strut and swagger, even with their motorized equipment.

Steve wandered toward the building commandeered by the Germans for headquarters. He moved with the speed compatible with the simple curiosity of an imbecile. He stood

with open mouth as the messenger slithered to a stop before the building.

And then Steve Zeno's mouth stayed open, frozen there. His eyes, for a swift betraying instant, lost their vapid look. He dragged it back with all the discipline he owned. He needed every ounce of will-power now, as he controlled the quivering of his muscles and the dryness of his throat. The messenger was Heinrich Wolfe! It was too late, now, to turn away.

Wolfe racked his motorcycle, turned, and met Steve's vacuous stare. The muscles of Wolfe's long, mean face drew taut. His eyes bored at Steve.

"Who are you?" he demanded in harsh German.

Steve let his grin go loose and simple. His eyes stayed blank in obvious pantomime that he had not understood the question.

"Answer me, you swine!" raged Wolfe.

Steve clung to his act. He backed away and cringed, alarmed, bewildered. Wolfe made a threatening move to follow, when the sentry at the door called out with obvious enjoyment:

"Ho, Wolfe! Friend of yours?"

Wolfe half turned toward the sentry as if reluctant to take his eyes from Steve. "I think I've seen him somewhere," he declared.

THE sentry laughed, enjoying the joke. Then he explained, "His name is Scopas. He's the village idiot. Himmel! A million other Greek donkeys look like him."

Wolfe accepted this reluctantly. He worked it over in his slow brain until the logic was apparent. His face was red when he finally growled:

"You're probably right. But I thought for a moment that—"

His voice trailed off as he pulled himself together with a show of dignity. He patted his uniform in place and started for the doorway. He moved deliberately, a fact which registered on Steve, despite his inner turmoil. It meant that Wolfe was not the bearer of alarming news. He probably carried only routine orders. Steve found it reassuring.

He walked around the motorcycle a few times, studying it with vacant awe, taking time to pull himself together in order that his retreat might not appear too hasty. He finally ambled off with the air of a person whose mind had been temporarily taxed by something he could not understand. Once back in his own room, he sat stiffly on the bed and let the cold sweat chill his skin.

He had competed against Wolfe in the 1936 Olympics at Berlin. Although neither of them had finished among the leaders, each man, nevertheless, represented the best his coun-

try had to offer. They had battled from the Olympic stadium along the Havel Chaussée, along the five-mile stretch of the Avus motor racetrack, than back to the stadium over the same distance. They had good reason to remember each other. The memory was particularly alive and sharp with Steve, because Wolfe had licked him by a hundred yards.

Instinct warned Steve to keep out of sight. Logic counseled otherwise. The Nazis were accustomed to seeing Steve about the street. Furthermore, he felt it necessary to learn what Wolfe was doing here, whether he would return immediately, or would stay until next day.

The point was settled to Steve's satisfaction when Wolfe, a little later, left his motor bike at the garage with orders to have it ready in the morning. Kyriakides or Alcemenes would do a proper job on it.

The grind of waiting settled down again. Would the Rangers land on schedule, or would Steve's months of patient labor be washed out in sev-

eral bloody, blazing moments? Was his underground machine as tight and faultless as he'd tried to make it? Or would some faulty cog give way under pressure? He'd know these things for certain, before long.

At ten minutes before midnight, forms began to move, unseen by Nazis, through the shadows of the village. There would be other forms, their missions similar, in a wide area about Marathon. They would be moving with swift accuracy, men who knew the silent value of a knife.

Steve Zeno wasn't limping as he made for his objective. The pad from his shoe had been removed. There was a guard at the door of the radio hut in Marathon. He didn't see Steve soon enough, and he died without a sound.

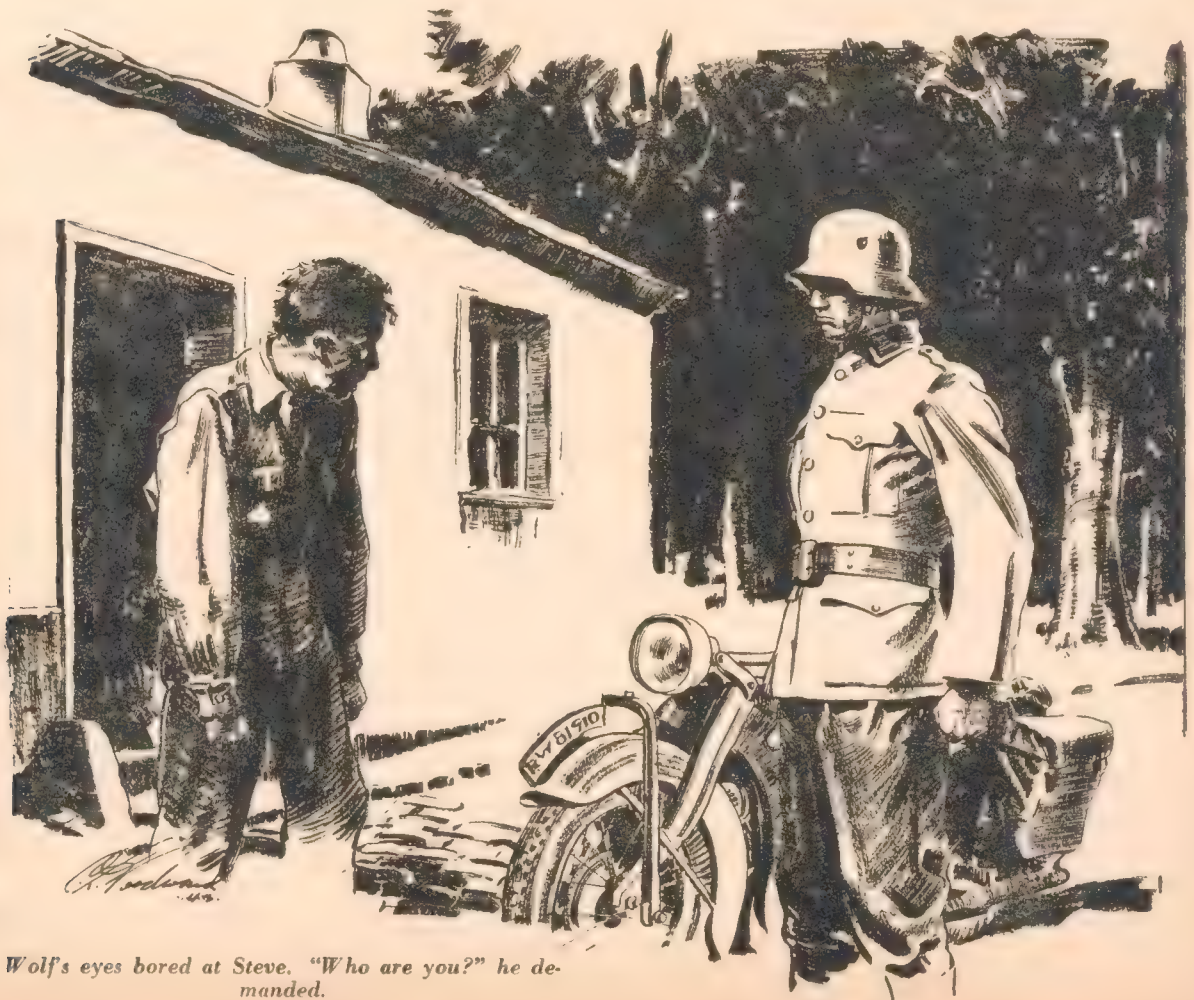
The operator inside fared no better. He died just as quietly. The blood from his throat fouled the radio equipment, but Steve's hands were steady and unhurried as they wrecked the set beyond immediate repair. . . .

The Rangers kept their date at midnight. Steve heard the sound of gunfire as he stepped outside. It came from the direction of the shore-line, and was significantly brief. Steve knew the reason. Mansolus was on hand down there with his guerrillas. Attacking from the land, the Greeks had helped to smash all early opposition.

Another strong band of guerrillas stormed the village now, to make the Rangers' imminent occupation even easier. Nazis rushing from the houses were shot down. Others barricaded themselves against hopeless odds. Steve saw some of them escape into the darkness.

Steve identified himself to the guerrillas, but he wasn't ready yet to join them. He had to think, had to subdue his wild elation while he probed in every corner of his mind for some item of preparedness he might possibly have overlooked. His job was to destroy all communication.

He had the unsettling belief that things were working out too smoothly



Wolfe's eyes bored at Steve. "Who are you?" he demanded.

—that some small vital factor had slipped past him. The feeling, he told himself, was involuntary and quite normal. It had its parallel in the feeling of a person who, hurrying to catch a train, is always certain that he has forgotten to pack some of the things he'll need. Conceding this comparison, he convinced himself that he had left no unprotected loophole. His shock, therefore, was more profound when a glaring error in his calculations struck him with the violence of a bullet.

He had prepared for everything—mechanical. He had destroyed all man-made communications, and had carelessly forgotten man himself. He had left the distance runner, Heinrich Wolfe, outside his close-laid plans.

STEVE let out an angry curse, then saved his breath. He knelt and carefully snugged the laces of his shoes. He did not underestimate the Nazis. They were cunning and resourceful. They might not know, at first, that Wolfe was capable of running to Athens with the news, but Wolfe, undoubtedly would remind them of it. It was all too possible that Wolfe was one of those whom Steve had seen escape into the darkness.

Steve headed toward the road to Athens, moving at a swinging jog. A half-mile out of town he met the men who had been posted there with handgrenades to destroy any motor vehicle which might have managed to escape. Steve questioned them. No, they hadn't seen a man go by on foot.

Steve swung into his stride again. Wolfe would have been smart enough, he reasoned, to circle wide before he reached the Athens road—assuming, always, that Wolfe had been sent upon the run.

There was, of course, the strong chance that Steve was embarking upon a solitary jaunt, that Heinrich Wolfe was not ahead of him. Wolfe might be dead back there in Marathon. And even if he had escaped—was he in shape to run that distance?

Steve believed that Wolfe would be in shape. He based his decision upon his knowledge of distance runners of Wolfe's type. He knew that distance-running can become a fever with some men; and his brief contact with Wolfe had convinced him that Wolfe was one of these, that the urge of the sport would never die within him, that his arrogance was too great, that his inherent craving for superiority in some field would drive him to the effort of keeping always in condition.

This, of course, was theory, but it sustained Steve as he swung along. He crossed the Charadra stream, with still no sight of Wolfe ahead. Yet something made him certain that the Nazi was in front of him. He set his

mind on this because he did not dare to doubt it.

He fought against the strong desire to close the gap he hoped was separating him from Wolfe. It was hard to maintain his steady, low-heeled stride, to keep his muscles loose, relaxed, to subdue his mental fretfulness.

Reaching the stiff hills outside Marathon, it required sharp discipline to slow down almost to a walk, to save his strength until he'd need it most. But just when would he need it? Would it be best to squander his strength now in the hope of overhauling Wolfe? Or by doing this, would he waste himself to the point where Wolfe, upon seeing him, would be able to stay ahead. It was a hard choice. Steve made it calmly, and held his even pace.

The moon was bright. The air was hot and heavy. The sweat began to trickle down his face. When he stopped for a brief rest at the top of a steep rise, he stripped down to his shorts, and tossed his clothes aside. Then he broke into his shuffling jog again, folding his handkerchief as he went along. He tied it about his forehead to keep the perspiration from his eyes.

About five miles out of Marathon he began to struggle with his second wind, a depressing, worrying experience, even for those who are accustomed to it. There is always the gnawing fear that, this time, the second wind may not arrive. It was late in coming to Steve now—and this was the moment when he saw the German on a brightly lighted stretch of road, about a quarter of a mile ahead!

The shock was physical as well as mental. It seemed to jerk the last remaining breath from his straining lungs. The immediate result was frightening, but the following effect was beneficial. That final hoarse expulsion seemed to clear his breathing tract. His next breath came in deeply, smoothly. He had his second wind.

Combating the urge to close the gap, he deliberately gave his body time to readjust itself. Wolfe was out of sight again, but a strange new calmness found its way along Steve's nerves. The job ahead was no longer blurred with speculation. It had resolved itself to simple clearness. The German must be caught before he could reach Athens.

With his second wind established now, with a new lightness to his legs and feet, Steve eased more strength into his stride. Wolfe was closer by two hundred yards when Steve saw him next upon one of the infrequent stretches of straight road.

He could see Wolfe clearly. The German was also stripped down to his shorts; and from the ease and smooth-

ness of his stride, Steve could tell that Wolfe was not encumbered by heavy shoes. Somewhere he had found a pair of light ones. The Nazi was in shape, too. Steve could tell that from the way he moved, unaware that Steve was trailing him.

And then some premonition must have worked its way into Wolfe's brain. He glanced across his shoulder, stopped dead in his tracks, then turned and stared. Steve kept on while Wolfe lost precious seconds battling with his incredulity.

It appeared that Wolfe was ready for a fight. He had recognized Steve now, had established his identity. Steve slowed to a walk. This was more than he had hoped.

His anticipation, however, was short-lived. Wolfe whirled about and broke into a run which bordered on a sprint. It was an uncontrollable touch of panic, which failed to coincide with the unquestionable animal courage Wolfe possessed.

Easing himself back into his own stride, Steve traveled for several hundred yards before he figured where his reasoning had gone wrong. He had expected Wolfe to fight. Now he knew why the Nazi had refused.

The answer was German discipline, the blind obedience to orders which precludes all individual reasoning beyond that point. Heinrich Wolfe had been ordered to deliver a message to Athens. He would deliver the message or die in the effort. He would also avoid all possibility of dying before the message was delivered.

IT was a race now, a race with more at stake than Steve had ever believed a race could hold. Wolfe had recovered from his panic now, but had also regained part of the ground he'd lost by stopping. They were close enough together now so that they were seldom out of each other's sight. They were about one hundred and fifty yards apart; and Wolfe, by frequent backward glances, held that exact advantage as the miles unwound. Once more he was deliberate and unhurried. He had beaten Steve Zeno in the past, and he would beat him now.

Wolfe set a wicked pace. Steve began to feel it, but was forced to meet it by the necessity of keeping Wolfe in sight. He was sustained, at first, by the mere presence of the man ahead, but the sameness of this began to lose its stimulus as the fingers of fatigue began to fumble at his muscles.

He tried to think of other things, the time element, for instance. It was twenty-two miles from Marathon to Athens. The distance, at this pace, should be covered in about two and a half hours. If Wolfe managed to get the message through, reinforcements would be roaring toward Marathon

shortly after that. The Rangers would be caught at a disadvantage. Given the rest of the night, they would have an infinitely better chance to consolidate their position. It all depended upon Steve.

He had to overtake the Nazi, Wolfe; but Steve began to wonder if he could. Wolfe was still running powerfully, with the distance more than half completed. The pounding on the hard road was beginning to tell upon Steve's legs. He tried to forget his aching feet, tried to chain his mind to some outside distracting thought.

He felt like a fool when the revelation burst upon him like a blinding flood of light: His mind had been so filled with other things that the tremendous significance of this run had not found space to enter. It came in now with a crowding rush which temporarily thrust aside his weariness.

Marathon to Athens! The Marathon race had been born upon this very route, over two thousand years ago! How could he, a Greek, possibly have forgotten that?

Pheidippides had covered this same distance—in fact, a greater distance, because Pheidippides had run from the Plain of Marathon, several miles below the village.

As he ran, Steve delved into his knowledge of Greek history to recall the details of that great event: The Persians were invading Greece in overpowering numbers. The Athenians, fearful of meeting the entire impact of the Persian armies, sent a messenger, Pheidippides, to Sparta, begging aid, only to find that the Spartans were not inclined to join the fight. Pheidippides ran back to Marathon. He had covered two hundred and forty miles in two and a half days; yet he seized his spear and shield and fought in the battle against the Persians. And when the Persians were defeated, Pheidippides ran to Athens with the news of victory, driving his weary body over this very distance which his courage had immortalized. Reaching Athens, he had lived just long enough to gasp: "Rejoice! We conquer!"

"There," reflected Steve, "was a real man."

It was a stimulating thought to bear in mind. It made his own present efforts seem puny by comparison. He was weary, yes. But how must Pheidippides have felt at this same stage? His feet, probably had been torn and bleeding through the poor protection of his sandals, his body racked with torture. Yet Pheidippides had kept on.

It came to Steve, with a surge of mild surprise, that something had happened to his stride. He hadn't been aware that it had changed, but it was longer now, and smoother than

*Illustrated
by
Cleveland
Woodward*

The strength—the force carrying him didn't seem to be his own. It seemed to flow from an outside source.



it had been for the past five miles. He wondered how Pheidippides had been built. Tall? Short? Slender? Stocky? He decided that the Greek had been clean-limbed and wiry.

WOLFE seemed closer. Was it a trick of the moonlight, an optical illusion? Wolfe himself supplied the answer. He glanced behind. Surprise showed in his jerky movements. He made a hasty, uncoordinated effort to regain his stride. He stumbled, floundered for a moment, then forced his legs once more into their rhythm.

It told Steve something of great value. It told him that the Nazi was also withering from the heat of the terrific pace. Wolfe's efforts to increase his speed revealed his plight still further. His legs were heavy, lifeless, pounding hard against the road.

The hills of Athens were now visible. Time and space were converging toward the dead-line. Steve's common sense and logic told him that he didn't have the strength to catch the German. The burning caldron of his lungs rebelled at every breath. His legs seemed automatic, groping things. He wondered why they didn't crumple. Yet they didn't. They sustained him past the rational point of their remaining power. They moved with a steady cadence which closed the gap by slow degrees.

Steve couldn't understand it. He didn't try to. He was not a superstitious man. He did not believe in ghosts or phantoms. Yet something quite outside his power of comprehension was happening to him now.

He put it down as an hallucination brought on by fatigue. In no other way could he explain the man who seemed to run beside him. There was no sound of falling feet. The shuffling of sandals, probably, but that could be explained by the rustling of the olive trees along the road.

The strength—the force which was carrying him with such relentlessness toward Wolfe? It didn't seem to be his own. It seemed to flow from an outside source.

Wolfe glanced behind again, and realized he was beaten. He turned, stood spraddle-legged in the road, and waited. He swung a heavy fist when Steve came up to him. The blow was clumsy, wild. It missed, and turned the German half around.

Steve stepped in back of him. He hooked an arm about Wolfe's neck, then drove a knee into Wolfe's spine. Wolfe's back snapped with a brittle sound. He was dead.

Steve faced toward Athens. He stood for a long moment, the strangeness still upon him. He spoke involuntarily. The words were uncontrolled—they didn't belong to him. He scarcely knew he'd spoken them. He said:

"Rejoice! We conquer!"

*A Novel of our Professional
Army in Time of War*

The STARS

The Story Thus Far:

STEVE WYATT, chancing upon Brenda Rhule—divorced wife of a brother officer—in the famous Rio Bar in San Eliséo, had no premonition that this evening would bulk large in his life. But shortly after Brenda had left him on the balcony to rejoin her group, Steve leaned forward to stare at a tall, handsome girl who had appeared in the crowd below. Ten years of serving on the Mexican border in cavalry posts didn't give you many of that glamorous sort.

And then—a man spoke to her: a stranger evidently, but a smoothie, pointing out objects and people of interest. Presently this fellow persuaded her to the door leading to the patio. . . . Something very phony about this, Major Wyatt decided, and he walked downstairs and out the door into the dark patio himself—to see two men forcing the girl in a car.

Steve Wyatt was big, strong and fit—and now he was aroused. In the fight that ensued, one man was left dead, shot by his own pistol; another was knocked unconscious; the third fled. Steve got the girl into a taxi, and sent her to her hotel; she promised to meet him there next noon. Then he re-

turned to the scene of the fight to recover a wrap she had dropped; he found it, but the men and the car were gone. And the girl—he did not even know her name—failed to keep her appointment.

Steve went back to the Post, to find that his regiment of young Texas cavalrymen was to be made over into paratroopers under a new commander, General Thrale. . . . He met Thrale and his daughter. Mallory Thrale did not recognize Steve, but he knew her at once for the girl of that adventure in San Eliséo.

Soon after, at a Post dance, Steve was amazed to see again Brenda Rhule; she had inveigled an invitation from Nancy Vance, one of her former friends at the Post, and under her maiden name of Adamson, had moved in for an indefinite stay—with the avowed intention of winning back her

former husband, Kirk Rhule. In this she seemed very likely to succeed, for it was evident that Kirk's feeling for her was still strong. . . .

The change-over of the regiment to paratroops went on apace, with highly intensive training. It was a shock to these gay young Texans when one lad was killed while on maneuvers; but his twin brother, Billy Pitman, volunteered to replace him in the "suicide platoon."

Steve, who because of a letter he had found did not wholly trust Brenda, felt puzzled by her growing friendship with Mallory Thrale, but he had no real grounds for protest; and Mallory, high-spirited and generous, but willful, would have brooked no interference with her affairs. Indeed, she became deeply offended at Steve when he denied her permission to join in a night parachute jump.



SHINE BRIGHT

by Charles L. Clifford

Who wrote "Army Girl,"
and "Typhoon Dawn."

When Brenda heard from the indignant Mallory of Steve's refusal, she suggested that the two of them meet to observe the night's maneuvers from the tower near an old ruined chateau. Mallory delightedly agreed, unconscious of the fact that the tower was to be an objective in an attack with live ammunition. Meanwhile, Steve completed his arrangements for the "problem." (*The story continues in detail:*)



*"Tell them to
stop firing!"
Steve turned.
Mallory Thrane
—his general's
daughter.*

WHEN General Thrane and his party arrived, Steve had the new set-up pretty well in mind. When he saw the short, keen-eyed man with the three stars of a lieutenant-general looking him over, for a moment he nearly did have buck fever. General Thrane introduced them, and Steve felt a hard, quick handclasp. Something in the feel of that grip of hands made him believe all he had heard of this man. And he remembered what one old-timer had said: "What he means, he says; and what he says is *right*." The stiffness of his hair, the sharp face made Steve think of a tougher Joe Vance. "Well, I'd better say what I mean," he thought when all his of

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

ficers had assembled. He realized that these watching officers would guess that he had had ample time to have his earlier orders down pat. He knew it when the three-starred general gave him a sharp look, then turned to General Thrale.

"The inclusion of this new land will make a new estimate of the situation necessary, I presume, General?"

"That's right, sir."

Kirk handed Steve an aerial map and the latest G-2 report. "It's all here up to date, sir," he said.

Steve looked it over as his officers gathered about him. It was dark now, and they grouped under a rock overhang, shielded from the air by a camouflaged tent-fly. The shaded light cast faint shadows on the tanned, earnest faces; the sound of an airplane searching came from far overhead.

STEVE knew these watching men wanted him to talk as he would talk in war: estimate his situation briefly, shrewdly; point out objectives, make his dispositions and give concise simple orders to carry out his decision.

He felt a little nervous at first; but, as he got into the spirit of this act, reminding himself that this must be done just as it would be in real action, all his old confidence in himself came back. When he concluded, he looked around him at the earnest faces of his officers.

"Are there any questions?"

There were none. And he felt a great relief. Questions often meant the fault of ambiguity, obscurity in the commander: or lack of attention, perhaps stupidity in his officers.

Steve glanced at his watch, gave them the time. Now they would return to their men, give their detailed orders to the smaller units which they directly controlled. How well they did that was up to them; but Steve had faith in them all. They had justified it, proved their keenness in the training weeks that had passed.

As they broke up to return to their units, Steve noticed that the three-star general moved away with them. He would listen to some of them, go right down to the bottom. At the end he would question privates; discover how precise, or how confused, this chain of intent had been wrought.

General Thrale came over to Steve. "That was very well done, Wyatt. I hope things turn out as well."

"I feel that they will, sir."

"There's the question, of course, of dive bombers on that house. But I feel that it's a poor target in the dark. And there's the question of air interference. Also a certain lack of surprise if they don't get it the first try. I think your idea is sound. You'll be on the ground, and you're familiar

"It's me: Private Pitman, Major."

with it from the model. If you get your mortars on it the first thing, you ought to knock it out quickly. Then go in with your designated platoon. It should be a nice little bit of action. Luck we got that land in time, eh?"

"It certainly was. Because, normally, they'd use that much ground. The way it was, it was a little artificial."

The General laughed. "Yes. The Nazis would hardly be squeamish over using private property."

Steve and Colonel Ames checked over their time-schedule, and everything seemed in order. There was to be no sleep: in a few hours the men were to be on the march, mostly at the double; and when they reached the Post airfield, any weakness of condition would quickly be apparent.

"But they'll all be there with their heads up," Steve said to Ames.

"They're tough babies, all right," Ames grinned. "Imagine, twenty miles in full equipment, no sleep and then go into action."

"And tomorrow with a day off, they'll be running around out on that conditioning course," Steve said, "making bets! Speaking of bets, you win that bet we made," he added. "I want to put some mortars right where you're supposed to drop me. I'll take that outfit in my plane. I want that chateau to go to glory in the first minute of action."

"Can do. Poor old Sam what's-his-name, though! Probably turn over in his grave."

Steve laughed, remembering what Mallory Thrale had said about Sam's

plans for her father. He said: "He's probably become an acrobat by this time with all the indignities he must think Texas has suffered. But he'd be proud of these boys of ours. Wouldn't he love all the shooting? By the way, did you get Brenda to San El all right?"

"I dropped her at the field. Why didn't you tell me she was engaged to Rhule? Wasting all that time!" He laughed; Steve laughed with him.

"Didn't you bring her back?"

"Sure. But my heart wasn't in it."

THEIR heads were up, as Steve had prophesied, when they trotted out to the airfield beyond the Post. The dark bulk of the great transport planes showed dimly against the faintly starlit sky. There wasn't a sound of command as they moved with orderly precision into the designated planes, whose motors were idling in a steady, grim chorus. The night air was still,





and Ames said flying conditions were as nearly perfect as they get.

Back somewhere in the night, Steve knew that Vance's men were lying, waiting. When they got the word, they too would run under their heavy burdens. And when they reached this field, the great planes that were to carry them—even now perhaps winging their way from San Eliséo airfield—would be waiting; waiting to take them, their jeeps, cannon, machine-guns, motorcycles—all the impedimenta of their hard-hitting force—to the airfield that he and his men would by then have seized and prepared for their landing. It would be day by then and these cautious, watching visiting officers would be on the spot. Checking casualties, dispositions, listening to the tale each leader had to tell of his attack on his separate objective.

It would be a big, tough night. Men might die; men would be hurt—some badly, perhaps.

Steve Wyatt smiled grimly. Suppose he had listened to that pleading girl? Had her now in that dark cave of a plane, dressed as a paratrooper, ready to go with them! What would that

keen-eyed general from Washington have thought of that? One guess!

Right now he could see them: a shadowy group close by the command plane. He saw a hand point: Kirk indicating himself. They walked over. The three-starred general talked with him, in a low, crisp voice. Asked him a few searching questions, and he answered them promptly.

"All right! Ready!"

The reports were all in. His men were loaded, waiting. He stood alone a moment, and he was surprised when the General's hand came toward him. He could see the quick gleam in those keen eyes.

"Good luck, boy!"

Kirk Rhule came running up. "Steve! A man just came out here from the Post, looking for you. Important, he says; he's—" The rest was lost in the growing roar of the motors.

Steve Wyatt was full of the work at hand; tense now with his instant, important acts. Afterward he realized he had hardly listened to what Kirk Rhule said, that the intent was certainly lost on him.

He was watching Colonel Ames, his arm shadowy outside the open window of the plane.

"We're pushing, Kirk. No time now, no matter how important. Let Mac handle it."

"Right!" Kirk yelled. "Good luck!"

Steve glanced at the luminous hands of his watch, waved again at Ames. "Okay." He hurried to the plane and got aboard.

The motors roared. The great plane shook, lurched. It was dead dark in that moving cavern, but he could feel the men about him. Almost, he thought, feel their breathing. What were they thinking? Of the danger ahead? Of the soul-stopping moment when they must, in steady cadence, jump out that doorway into utter blackness, find themselves then alone in the sky? Or were they thinking of others—families, girls they loved or wanted to love?

Who knew? You could never learn by asking. He had tried that. All you got was an embarrassed mumble or a too-coherent quip. He felt the shift of a gloved hand against his hand. The plane was off the ground, moving up into the lifting air.

"Pitman?"

There was a stirring beside him.

"Here, sir."

"You all right?"

"Sure am, Major!"

And that was true, he knew. Here was a kid who really loved this sort of thing. Strangely, the mother had become reconciled, he had learned. At first she had wanted him to transfer out. But young Billy had told him: "I said they'd only put me in some other outfit to get shot at. And I wouldn't have the fun. Nor I wouldn't be with Texas boys. Maybe get messed up with a bunch of them Yankees."

BEYOND Pitman in the plane was the place of a youngster who had been hurt in his last jump. Steve leaned over, wondering at his being here for duty so soon:

"Claiborne, I thought you were still on sick report."

"He's asleep, Major," Billy Pitman said quickly. "Plane puts him to sleep the minute he gets in, he says."

"Well, there it is," Steve thought. "So he's thinking of nothing."

The plane trembled into the night sky. Others moved in formation with it. It was only a short flight from the field to the scene of action, but for verisimilitude the plan called for an hour's ride in the sky. And that was all right too. "I feel like a sleep myself," Steve thought, and he laid his head against the quivering wall behind him. He slept as the plane hummed through the high night.

They were alerted now; and Steve, sharply awake, listened to Sergeant Sweeney as he had his last brisk say to the men. Sweeney was acting as jumpmaster, and when the door opened, Steve could see his thin, hard body outlined against the stars.



"She's all right, Billy. Where's your man?" Steve asked. The boy grinned and jerked his head backward.

Up in front, in the pilot's compartment, Steve knew that Ames was like a sailing hawk, watching—watching all that could be seen that would orient him exactly, enable him to give his swift orders to the following planes. The red light on the panel behind him winked off, became green.

They were on their feet now, ready, the long quiet line of men. In the faint light that came through the open door Steve could see the first few blackened faces under the deep helmets. Unless you knew the positions of each, you could not have picked out your own brother.

The wicked little mortars with their ammunition were in the plane directly behind. In this blackness their vari-colored 'chutes would mean little, and Steve had worked out a system of colored flares to descend with them as identifying markers.

"They'll draw fire," he admitted to Kirk, "but what the hell! So will our guns. It's simply a gamble with time—a question of intelligent risks."

THE roar of the planes made no sound from the ground intelligible. But Steve knew that men in deeply dug and carefully protected concrete shelters were already throwing up their spurious flak. As he stared out into the dim void, he could see the streaking trajectories cutting the background of the sky.

"Jump!" Sweeney said. He would be the last to go tonight, Steve the first.

Out Steve went, into the familiar tear of the rushing air. He felt the touch of a hand as he left the plane; and he grinned, thinking of the impatience of young Billy Pitman.

The jerk came, and Steve looked up at the swelling 'chute as he always did. It was like a strange, unconnected blot against the stars. Above him he could see the stabbing exhaust of the passing planes, hear the deafening roar of them, and looking down, the dark, dark nothingness that was the swiftly approaching earth.

He felt for his flare pistol, drew it out, cocked it. He hoped he landed where Ames had promised. The fellow had eyes like a cat. It wouldn't be far away, he felt sure. The thing was to find that cuplike depression, rally the men and their weapons under cover while they set up. Because now the cat was well out of the bag, and machine-gun fire in the actual case would soon be pouring toward them.

It was a drop from less than eight hundred, and you only had a few sec-

onds. He marked his target down. It was clear, very black against the lighter sky: Sam Hewitt's "chateau." In a few minutes it would be a mass of dust and crashing rubble.

He passed the treetop line and set himself for the ground. He lit, not too hard, and rolled, tore loose from his 'chute, fired his signal.

He could see, looking up, that the mortars were coming down close, well bunched, and now men were landing about him. They were dark, hurrying blots, quiet and efficient as they ran for their weapons, raced toward him.

The chateau was less than a mile away, and he checked with the section sergeant. The man knew his business and had his orders, and Steve made no attempt to interfere. But he had to watch the time, be sure that all his men were down and in position before the firing order was given.

He looked at his watch, listened to the passing planes overhead. It seemed hours before the "all clear" came from Ames' plane.

He heard Billy Pitman's quick breathing close by him. He had proved a good runner, and now Steve could imagine the blaze of excitement in the kid's eyes. There was no such thing as make-believe for Billy. Every move was the real thing. Those rushing tracers, flares, were ball ammunition to him.

He could hear old Sweeney's growls and, the section sergeant's muffled reply.

Then came the Sergeant's report. The little mortars were ready to fire. All men were present and accounted for. No casualties. This was to the good.

Steve looked at his watch, gave the order. Almost at the words, the air rocked with the discharge of the pieces. Flame stabbed from them, and their heavy shells lobbed toward what once had been the pride of old Sam Hewitt. A star-shell burst bright above them.

Steve could see the flash of the bursting shells against the hulking roof. Tiles would be crashing there now, crashing into the tangled garden, clattering down on the weed-choked flags of the once-grand terrace.

FROM all sides now came the beat of machine-guns; in the distance they could see the flash of bursting grenades. Garand rifles spat steady streams of fire, and incendiaries had already hit a planted gas-and-oil dump, and flames shot high into the sky.

"Now we got something to see by," Sweeney growled, and the section sergeant gave the order to drop the shells lower.

"Holy heifer, we ought to get that tower!" Billy Pitman yelled. "Knock her hell west and crooked!"

"You pipe down, Pitman!" Sweeney said. "Watch your business there with the Major."

Steve felt a quick grip on his arm. "Tell them to stop it! Stop firing!"

He turned, looked into the black-smear face. To him, in that eerie glow, it looked like the face of any of them. But it wasn't the voice of any of them. He cursed, instinctively, and ugly words formed in him. But they were driven back by the ferocity of that rushing voice.

"Brenda Adamson is in that house! She'll be killed!"

This was Mallory Thrale. His general's daughter! That was all that stood out in the madness of this fantasy. No use pondering it, no time or place to question it. He shot a quick look at the target of the guns. They were all on it now, and it was disintegrating like rotten cardboard in a wind before his eyes. Already flames were leaping from its tinder-dry inner structure, and a great cloud of dust hung above it against the blood-red sky.

He turned and seized Mallory Thrale by the arm.

"How do you know she is? It's impossible. Men have been posted out there before the attack. She—"

"Do something! Sergeant, stop those guns! Sergeant Sweeney!"

Sweeney stared, seemed unable to speak.

She was shouting at the section sergeant now, and he looked at Steve Wyatt in wonder.

"Cease firing," Steve Wyatt said, and the guns died almost at once. Then he took Mallory Thrale away from the staring eyes of the watching, black-faced men.

"Now?"

She shook from him. "Let me go!"

He held her again, grimly. "You're not going to that house. There's live ammunition flying all about here. Look! Out there!"

She fought against him; then he heard her hoarse, fierce sobbing. He held her more gently then. "Tell me," he said.

"I was to meet her out here. She wanted to watch the problem. Then I—"

"How did you get in Claiborne's place?"

"Please! I lied to them. Don't—"

"Forget them. What else?"

"I confided in her. Told her I'd meet her at the house after I'd jumped. I didn't realize— We've got to do something!"

"All right," Steve Wyatt said, and he turned and called to Pitman. He took him aside and gave him low-voiced, hurried orders. Then he talked quietly with the section sergeant. Mallory Thrale watched him, standing where he had left her. Then she came toward him, and he saw that tears smeared the fantastic black on her face.

"You're not sending that boy!"

"Just to an aid station. You stay here, please. Just sit here."

"Where are you going?"

"The way I'm going will be all right. You don't think I'm going to stop this exercise, do you?"

She stared at him as though stricken. "You mean—even a human life means nothing to you? Compared with this—this—exercise?"

"Please do as I say."

He started off, and she came breathlessly after him. "I'm going with you."

He could argue with her and waste time. While a woman might be lying bleeding to death—burning to death! "It's your own risk. I can't waste time going into that."

She said no more and followed him as he ducked into the head of the small arroyo. It was safe enough, he thought, if he went by the way he had in mind. There was only one bad place, and there the ground was level and fire might sweep across it. But it had to be done. Once at the house, he could take what he found of Brenda Adamson out the back way toward the old county road. Plenty of cover in back, and soon there should be an ambulance in the road, under cover of the gorge.

He kept a close eye on her as they raced along, bent double—called to her, guided her before they came to places he knew were exposed. Already he could see the dust kicking up on the hard dry plain that lay ahead at the top of the last, shallowing arroyo. For there pillboxes had special target preparation on them, and would be examined for hits at the conclusion of the exercise.

"Wait here. Lie flat."

"I'm going to that house. With you! Why couldn't you have stopped the firing—for a human life?"

He lay beside her, breathing hard. He said grimly: "I could have. But I didn't. And there's not much chance of being hit. Going fast."

"I'll go as fast as you," she said harshly. "Wait and see."

"Then come on. It's quiet out there now."

It was only a matter of a little over a hundred yards, and he'd done that in fifteen seconds with his equipment. But this girl—

He needn't have worried. When he at last reached the cover of the heavy grove beside the house, she was only a few yards behind him. Then she stumbled and he grabbed her threw her behind the trunk of a huge live-oak tree. They were both breathless, and he stood there with his arm about her, dragging great gulps of air into his lungs.

She was the first to move. "We've got to hurry."

They ran then along the weed-grown wall. Cinders and flaming bits of debris fell about them, touched their faces with searing fragments. The ash-filled air was stifling. Steve pulled his silk muffler from him and told her to tie it about her mouth. He used his handkerchief for the same purpose.

They reached the rear of the house at last. The wind blew from the gorge, and here they could breathe the cool, untainted air from the river.

"Where would she be?"

"In the tower, I think."

STEVE looked up at the circular monstrosity. It was intended to be in the Norman style, he supposed: the chances were, old Sam had copied some provincial landmark of France and added his own Texas trimmings. That stained glass for his "memorial window" at the Rio Bar perhaps had come from the original.

The flames had not yet affected the tower, but the thing looked as though it might tip over at any moment. It leaned at a crazy angle, and the light from the main structure flickered red in its upper leaded windows.

Mallory Thrale was pushing her way through heaped tile and smashed stone.

"We can get in this back way!" she called above the crackling of the fire. "Follow me."

"You can't go up there. Wait here so I can call down to you. Don't be a fool."

"Or a child, eh? I've got on an asbestos suit." She laughed rather shakily. "Claiborne was the flame-thrower man, don't you remember?"

He looked and saw that she was right. Even now she was pulling the parka-like top over her head and face.

"Give it to me. Hurry!"

"You mean take it off?"

"Yes."

She laughed then, and started to run. There was nothing to do but follow her. She stumbled, fell once; but was on her feet and running again before he could put a hand on her to stop her.

IT was dark inside the tower, and he drew his flash, threw the light on the round, dusty walls. No windows here: not for one flight up the circular stairs, at least. The stairs were narrow, but finally he forced his way by her, pushing her almost roughly against the plastered walls. He could see light ahead as they came around a curve—outside light from the leaping flames. . . . Already the heat was bad, and he could feel a steady rush of air down the tunnel-like place. An opening somewhere up there, and the air was being sucked down dangerously.

Mallory Thrale was calling now, shouting upward for Brenda Adamson.

Steve saw the gaping hole in the upper tower as they ran. A shell had torn through, exploded inside. Whatever was up there then, whatever alive, could not be alive now. He said nothing: she hadn't noticed it. But he didn't want her in front when they got there. . . .

Stones and heavy deposits of mortar cluttered the stairs now. One big block almost filled the narrow space. Steve had to tear it away, reach back and help her by it. She clung to his arm then, sensing, perhaps, what might lie ahead. They were close to a shattered window, and he looked at her streaked face. Black as it was, he knew it was white underneath, and he heard her suck in her breath. She met his eyes, and he saw the stunned, fearful look in them.

"You wait here."

There was only one more turn in the stairs before they would come to the open, belfry-like top.

She shook her head, pushed her hand against his side. He moved upward, she beside him, very close on the narrow stairs. He could hear her breathing heavily now; he dared not look again into her eyes.

They made the turn, looked up, saw the circular stone floor. It was bright here, bright with the eerie firelight. The blast of heat from below struck their faces, filled their eyes with ash. But they could see well enough, well enough to know that nothing human was here, no sign of having been here.

He heard a great sigh from Mallory Thrale.

"Thank God!"

He put an arm about her, and for a moment she leaned against him and breathed deeply and slowly.

"Is there a cellar?"

"Yes. A very solid one."

"She may have run there. Hoped that it was safe from gunfire."

"But—if she could do that—then she could have run out."

"She couldn't know where the shells were falling. She'd be afraid to take that chance."

She nodded, drew him toward the steps. "Let's hurry."

They reached the bottom of the stairs, and she showed him where there was an entrance to the cellar, just inside the house proper from the tower.

"It was his wine-cellar. He was very proud of it."

There was a great crash as they stood there partly through the heavy oak door that led to the steep stone steps. The floor under them shook.

"That must be the main roof going," Steve said. She nodded, gripped his arm tighter. She leaned by him, called down into the dark:

"Brenda! Brenda! Are you there? It's Mallory!"

Hollow and as from a great distance came an answering voice:

"Mallory? Mallory? Oh, Mallory!"

Steve Wyatt drew in a deep breath of the dank air. Well, thank God for that! She was safe. Hiding, scared to death, but safe enough. For there was nothing weak in that answering voice: rather, the expression of strong relief.

"Let me go to her alone," Mallory Thrale said. There was another crash outside, and he said, close to her ear so that she could hear him:

"Make it fast. I'll wait here. Call if you need me." And he handed her the flashlight and watched her rush down the curving stairs. As she disappeared around the stone corner, he wondered why he had done that. And then he knew. He was feeling closer to her now, more gentle. Fool as she'd been, recklessly unthinking of him, yet she had stood up well when the going was bad. She had stuck, taken the risks as they came. And she deserved the credit of the final act: let her meet Brenda alone—bring her out.

Steve waited. There was no further sound from below; the corner of the wall blocked out all but a dim reflection of the light Mallory Thrale

carried. Then that had gone, he realized, and he wondered. The place couldn't be big, that big: or had old Sam with his obsession for the exotic burrowed deep and tortuous caverns here? Perhaps Brenda in her panic had rushed into and lost herself in some remote labyrinth. . . .

Steve waited for what seemed many minutes. . . . No sound, no light. He became annoyed before he became alarmed. For it seemed to him that this was no time for them to swap experiences, sympathies, excuses. The place was burning down over their heads; there was no guarantee that this haven would long remain a haven. The old stones had taken a beating from the awful heat, and a shocking from the salvos of shells hurled against it. At any minute the tower might come down about them, block them off forever from the outside world.

Steve looked at his watch. Even as he stared, he heard the roar of the planes overhead. Vance and his airborne command was already coming in. That meant the paratroop task was done: the field taken, cleaned up.

It meant that, outside, the morning had come. His executive would carry on; but—he himself should be there.

He called out loudly to Mallory Thrale, and as he shouted her name, he ran down the great stone steps. Blackness met him as he made the turn around the wall from the bottom step—met his eyes; and then met his brain. He hardly felt the blow: it was soft, crushing. But he knew he was going out, and in the brief, fading thought that came to him, he wondered what it was that had hit him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE man in civilian clothes stared hard-eyed across the desk at Colonel McVey. The Colonel's face was pale and drawn under the harsh light from the single bare bulb in the room. He passed his fingers down under his eyes—a trick he had when he was badly worried—and said wearily:

"As I said, I'd stake my life on Wyatt's loyalty. I've given you his background. And I've known the man for ten years intimately."

"Perhaps you remember the case of the ex-naval officer who sold out to the Japanese? I worked on that case. One witness said that about him."

McVey looked down at the heavy veins on the back of his thin hands. His mouth was stubbornly drawn into a pale thin line:

"I still say it. And more than I will say it."

The other man smoothed out the paper in his hands. "On the other hand, this was taken from his shirt at the laundry. We've had a tail on the

others since they left Washington. They were registered at the Palms Hotel in San Eliséo at the same time Wyatt was. They were at the Rio Bar the same night Wyatt was. Our operator there gave us a positive identification. Of all of them! We checked back on Wyatt's every move since we found this."

"Why didn't you pick them up, then?"

"We don't work that way. We make no arrests until the case is complete. You must know that, Colonel!"

"And now you consider it complete?"

"If we could have stopped Wyatt before he went out on this exercise—As it is—" He shrugged. "Well, they told me you were the Post commander. All the others were out. It seems to me that in a case as serious as this, a training drill might have been interrupted."

"I'm only the administrative head here. However, I've already sent word out. When the problem is over, Wyatt will be available for questioning. You found nothing incriminating in his quarters?"

The F.B.I. man shook his head. "We have a man there. So far, nothing has turned up."

"If Wyatt was as smart as you make him out, would he have let such a thing go to the laundry in his shirt?"

"That's the queer thing," the F.B.I. man admitted. "But in this work you see funny things. They all slip, and most of the slips are as dumb as that."

McVey smiled wanly. "Your own slip, for instance—in losing their car on the way down here."

"One of those bad breaks. But not due to carelessness. When you get a blow-out in a new tire—" And he shrugged. "That's fate. But we've wired ahead. All crossings of the river are covered into Mexico. There are only two roads they can take. Border patrols and operators are alerted." He shook his head grimly. "But Miss Thrale—that's an awful thing, Colonel. You must understand: these people will stop at nothing. The nasty part of it is, they didn't drag her out of this camp: she *went*. The cook says she was in bed, apparently asleep, at ten o'clock. We checked on the alarm clock by her bed. It was set for three o'clock. And it had gone off at that time. So she planned to leave the house."

"You think they lured her in some manner?"

"What can we think? Her car is gone. And we got here too late to question her father. Colonel Rhule talked with me at the airfield over the phone. It was too late to stop Wyatt or Thrale, he said."

An orderly came into the office and handed McVey a message.

"Radio," he said curtly, and read it. The lines in his pale face seemed to deepen as he handed it to the F.B.I. man, whose hard eyes raced over the words. He looked up grimly from under his heavy brows.

"So Wyatt's gone? In the midst of the problem? And I understand that the exercise is taking place very close to the river." His eyes were knowing as they stared at McVey, who said:

"I can't see any purpose in that. Your reasoning: Why would he pick a night like this? Troops all over the place. Why not any quiet night?"

The F.B.I. man said swiftly: "Because tonight is the *first* night they decided the information they wanted was ready."

"Yes. I see," McVey said, and his eyes closed as though he were in pain. "Yes, they know, I suppose."

"These crooks have watched Thrale like a hawk. They have a man up there in Washington. Don't kid yourself about that. They've been studying on this for months. This is their special job, and they're masters of this kind of game. Can I get a plane? I want to get out to that field where the exercise is."

McVey looked at his watch. "You couldn't land. Not until daylight. But we can make it by car before that."

"This is in a defense zone, isn't it?" McVey nodded.

"Then you don't need to worry about a *posse comitatus*. Can you bring a couple of armed men? I'll take two operatives."

McVey picked up the telephone.

WHEN the scout-car made the last turn into the county road, it was almost daylight.

"There's a crossing up here, a rough one," McVey said.

"I wish to God we'd known that," the F.B.I. man said. "We could have phoned from San Eliséo to cover it. There's no mark of it on our maps."

"It's recent. Since the dry spell. I doubt if they'd know of it."

"This is the only way they could go. There are only the two roads to the Border. And both crossings are covered."

"Why Mexico? They're at war. They've got it almost airtight here now."

"That's right. It's tough to figure. But they'd be taking an awful chance to come back with that girl, wouldn't they?"

"If they knew the roads were watched," McVey pointed out.

"Yes. Lord, look at those flames! Has something gone wrong?"

McVey explained the problem briefly. "That's the reason we have to make this big detour. They're using live ammunition over there. But

we'll be in dead space along by the river." He broke off, and turned to stare at the road behind them. A motorcycle was roaring up, dust billowing behind it. It came abreast of the scout-car, and McVey saw a man clinging hard to the rocking side-car: in the saddle a black-faced paratrooper slowed at his command.

"What is this?"

The scout-car stopped, and the motorcycle came to rest beside it.

"I'm Private Pitman, sir. I'm taking the doctor over to that burning building. We shelled it, and the Major thinks someone was in there."

"Major who?"

"Wyatt, sir. He ran over there himself. Told me to—"

"Who was in there?" McVey demanded sharply, and the F.B.I. man leaned out, watching the trooper's face closely.

"Some lady. I don't remember the name; but Miss Thrale, she said so. When we started to fire, sir."

"Miss Thrale!"

Pitman turned his head. He hadn't meant to say that. He had promised—

"Look at me!" McVey snapped. "Speak out, now. When did you see Miss Thrale? Where?"

"She came out with us, sir. She—last I saw of her, she was running along up the arroyo with the Major. I guess she must have went to the house with him. Her friend and all—"

"My God!" McVey said. "How long ago?"

"Maybe a quarter-hour, sir. I had trouble locating the motorcycle—"

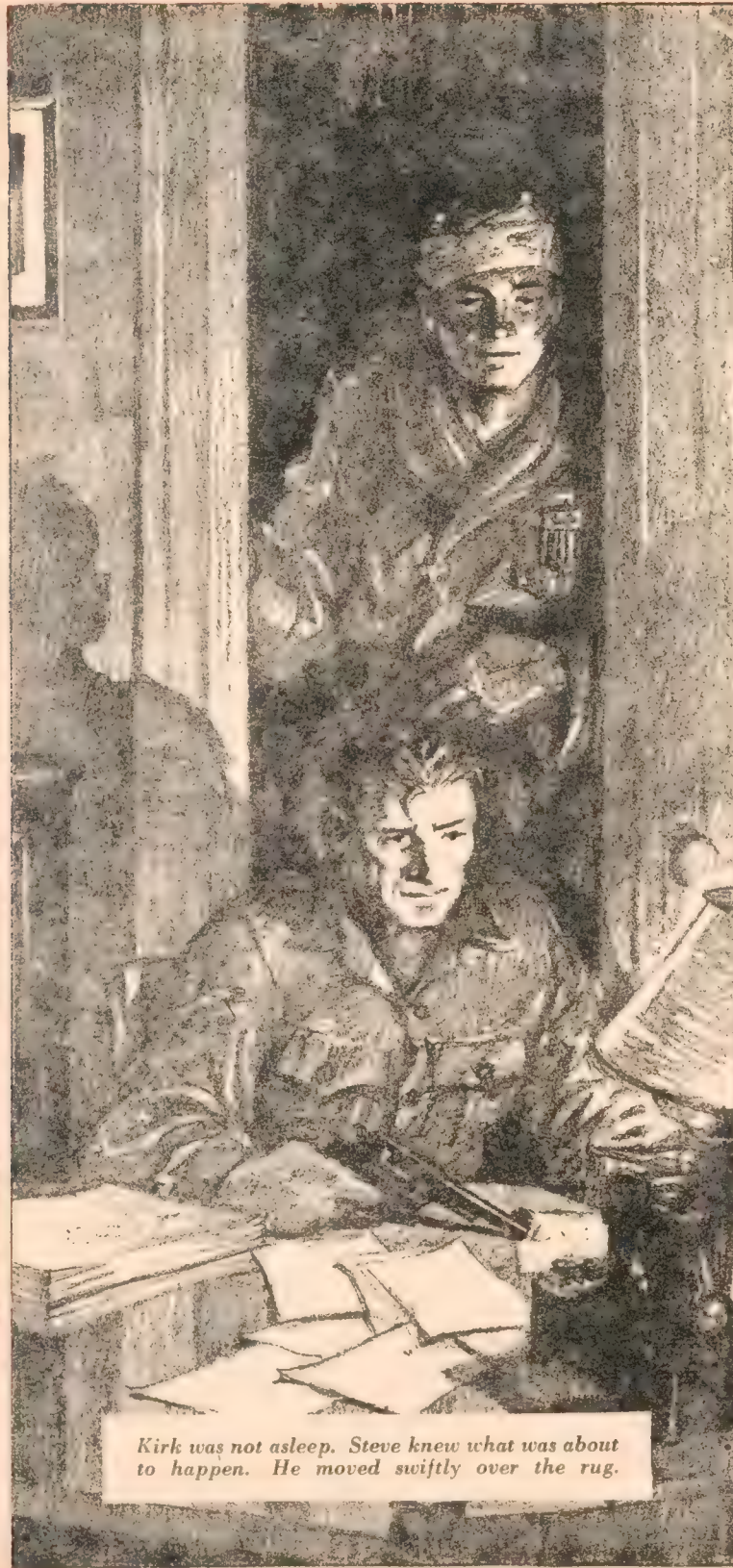
"Let's go," the F.B.I. man said grimly.

"Follow us," McVey said to the soldier. . . .

Steve Wyatt came to, on the back of a man. His body was shaking with the stumbling movement under him; his head was a huge blur. He tried to tighten his dangling hands—to reach up, to drive the hold on his body from him. His head cleared a little, and memory came seeping back. Cunning grew in him. He must wait for more strength. Lie loosely as he was, and then, when he was ready, strike with all he had—and with complete surprise.

It was dark, and the boots of the man under him struck, scraped against a hard surface: stone or concrete. That meant he was still in the cellar: he dared not open his eyes more than a slit's width, nor to breathe too deeply. The man stumbled against something. The first stone step, he guessed. It would be hard going for him now: a hundred and eighty pounds on his back.

At the last step—he'd do it there. At least he would be on top when they went crashing back down those ugly stone stairs.



Kirk was not asleep. Steve knew what was about to happen. He moved swiftly over the rug.

He counted the steps. He could make a good estimate, he thought. He wondered about Mallory Thrale. And Brenda Adamson! They'd dragged them out ahead, probably. Why hadn't they left him? Perhaps they thought he was dead and meant to toss his body into the river later. . . .

Five—six—seven. . . . How many steps? Twelve? Fifteen? Surely not more.

He slowly drew in a deep breath. The man was holding him loosely, but firmly enough. He was big and strong—that much was evident: and in good shape; he wasn't breathing heavily for such a job.

Light showed ahead. From the distance, faintly, came the roar of the big planes. They were still landing the airborne troops, then—he couldn't have been out long. They must be at the top step. That light was coming up from the garden door at the base of the tower.

"Well, here goes. And it better be good," Steve Wyatt thought. But he never made the smashing move. He heard a muffled curse, then:

"I've bulldogged eight hundred pounds of steer, but I never knew anythin' to be *this* heavy!"

"Pitman!"

HE was almost dropped then. The startled eyes turned, stared into his own, as he fell onto his feet and leaned weakly against the wall.

"Thank God you came to, Major! Down there when I threw the light onto you, I was afraid—"

Steve stood unsteadily and stared at the tough young trooper.

"What happened to Miss Thrale?"

The boy blinked; then a quick fear leaped into his bloodshot eyes. "Last I know, she was with the Major."

Steve knew he had to steady himself, his mind. Talk to this boy so as to get the most from him in the shortest time.

"Tell me what happened to you."

"I had a little trouble finding the aid station. Then I got this doctor and a motorcycle. Colonel McVey was out there on the county road in a scout-car with some men. He says follow him here. They stopped down by the river crossing, and was talking with some Mexican guards. I saw the place burning here. I got kind of worried, Major Wyatt—knowing you like I do."

"What do you mean—knowing me like you do?"

Pitman made an embarrassed motion with his big shoulders.

"Doing fool things. Like you might be in this blaze. Bud and me, we came up here once and got in the house. I know it was off limits. But we were feeling kind of foolish too, that day. We went all over, because

some of the boys said it belonged once to old Captain Sam Hewitt, who used to be in the Texas Rangers. So, we being in the new Rangers, we thought—"

"You broke in, eh?"

"Yes, sir. And seeing all that wood stuff inside, I knew she'd burn fierce. We'd found this cellar that day, too. So I looked all over fast—got burned some—" Steve saw now, looking closely, that his clothes were burned half off him and his face was seared through the black. "Then I thought of this cellar. How maybe you'd run here for cover, maybe got shut off. So I threw my light down, and there you were. All crumpled up in a ball in a corner."

Steve shook his head to clear it. It was hard to think with the beating pain growing in it. "What else did you see?"

"Nothing, sir. And I looked around careful."

The day had come clearly now; the firing and the roar of planes had stopped.

Steve Wyatt stood in the back road and watched the men coming toward him. He recognized Mac in the lead, and by his side a tall, grim-faced man in civilian clothes. On either side were two troopers with tommy-guns at the ready: members of the guard. As they came closer and the light showed clearly on their faces, he wondered at the strange look on the Colonel's face. He was about to speak when the tall civilian stepped forward, put a hand out. He saw him speak to Mac in a low voice, and then Mac said:

"Steve, I'm going to have to ask you to come back with us to the Post—under arrest. And I must warn you of your rights: not to make any statement at this time."

Steve Wyatt stood dazed. He saw, in the eyes of this man who had been his friend for years, sympathy, but also the firmness of the soldier issuing an official decree. He started to talk, bitter anger in his voice, but McVey stopped him with a few sharp words. He had tried to tell what had happened to him and to Mallory Thrale and Brenda Adamson.

"Go on, finish that," the man in civilian clothes said sharply.

"Who are you?" Steve said curtly.

The man made a quick motion with his hand. "Federal Bureau of Investigation," he said quietly, and returned the badge to his coat pocket.

With the words choking out, Steve Wyatt told what had happened, and the man stood aside a moment and talked swiftly to the two civilians who had waited behind the others.

"Let's go, then!" he said sharply, and they moved together toward the scout-car that stood just outside the garden wall.

CHAPTER TWELVE

STEVE WYATT sat on his bed and stared out through the screen window. The bright light of the Texas day was fading. From across the parade he heard the clear notes of the bugle, blowing First Call for Retreat. He stared moodily out, listened to the Assembly, and to the Colors. He could see the high top of the thin white flagstaff, see the flag float away from it in the light wind, slowly curl down the post into the waiting hands of the men. . . . His men.

His fists tightened, and he felt the heavy sweat on his forehead. He was in desperate trouble, and because he was guiltless, he must not beat his head against rock. Many guiltless men had been hanged, many accused spies. An unfair fate had done them in; would do him in unless he kept his head. And many in such straits had seen their supposed friends fade away—realized in one awful bitter period that they never had been friends.

The only break in the whole awful business was that they had put him in arrest in his quarters. His shame would have been complete if they had put him under the guard of his own men in the Post guardhouse. But he was well watched. Outside in the living-room was an F.B.I. agent; a sentry was posted around the house.

The worst, so far, had been when General Thrale had come in, stood in front of him for those few fearful moments.

"I can't quite believe this of you, Wyatt," he said, and his thin mouth tightened.

"I've tried to explain what happened, sir," Steve said from a dry throat.

"I've seen that letter. It looks pretty bad. I'm leaving the investigation to the F.B.I., in whom I have complete confidence. But I'll remind you that we are at war. And that I expect a complete statement from you promptly."

With that, he had walked out. Steve tried to realize the strain the man was under: his daughter gone, maybe dead; his command had just completed a test problem, was ready for the front, and now might be denied that honor.

Once again he thought over what the F.B.I. man had said when he showed him the letter.

"It couldn't be clearer. We've got a sample of this fellow's writing. Its wording is guarded, but its implication as to Miss Thrale is clear. And as to what they are after."

"It isn't addressed to me. And I told you how and when I found it."

"Mrs. Vance says there was nothing there when she closed the back of that

picture. She remembers the act perfectly."

"I told you why I did it."

The man gave him a hard look. "Yes. Now, I'll tell you: You put that in the picture when it was in this house. A smart hiding-place, though maybe a bit farfetched. Then you remembered. You went over to Vance's when you knew Miss Adamson was out, and retrieved it. You very nearly got caught in the act."

"Then I stuck it in a dirty shirt and let it go to the laundry. That *would* be smart, wouldn't it?"

"It happens."

"And I hit myself over the head and waited to be picked up. Is that usual?"

The F.B.I. man smiled unpleasantly.

"Quite. You've heard, of course, of the innocent bank cashiers who are found battered and tied up? After they've done an inside job for their pals."

Yes, he'd heard of that too.

Later, Kirk had come in. Kirk had been very decent; but Steve could see that he had also been worked on—hard. And he had said nothing beyond a few words of sympathy, and like Mac, had refused to believe the charge.

"But you see the spot I'm in," he had said.

But now Steve saw a change in him. His eyes were a gleam, and for an instant, he had forgotten their status.

"Wonderful news! Brenda's back!"

"Back?" Steve echoed stupidly.

"Yes. A rancher brought her in. Picked her up on the North Springs road. Poor kid was dazed, and badly beaten. She's in the hospital. She said they shoved her out of a car in a lot of mesquite, and she had walked for miles before she found a road."

"Mallory?"

Kirk shook his head. "Mallory's the one they were after. They sent some word by Brenda. But the F.B.I. only let me see her a moment, and in front of them. Poor kid, she was all in. But thank God she's alive!"

LATER, the F.B.I. man came back. He sat in the bedroom with Steve alone, and Steve didn't like the look on his face.

"I've just talked with the Adamson girl," he said, watching Steve closely.

"Yes?"

"She didn't remember much; she was in bad shape. But she did remember that when they grabbed her on that tower, one of them flashed a light. That answers your question—why should you shell the place if you had pals there? Then they went down to the cellar with her. Safe enough there."

"Did she say they hit me over the head with a sap?"

"They had her tied up. She couldn't see. She heard Miss Thrale call, and she yelled back. Just what they wanted, eh?"

"Did she hear them discuss me in any way? Later?"

"She says not. They dragged the two girls out, after blindfolding them. Drove for a long time and then dumped her out. *Where did they take Miss Thrale, Wyatt?*" His eyes were like blades as they held those of Steve Wyatt.

Steve shook his head wearily. "I've told you all I know."

"Have you?" He drew an envelope from his pocket, dumped an object out onto the palm of his hand. "Ever see this?"

"Plenty of them."

"But this matches an odd one found in your collar-box last night. You don't see many 14-carat gold major's leaves—with an El Paso jeweler's mark on them. This one was found in the cab you took from the Rio Hotel. The cabby described you pretty well too, considering."

"I told you about that."

"But not that you'd jumped the cab in a dark park. And no one in the Palms Hotel saw you come in that night. Honest men don't do that, Wyatt."

"Or go into a crowded lobby in a uniform in rags."

"Maybe. You want to talk yet?"

"I've told you all I know."

"Why did you cut your leave short? You had a week; you took only two days of it."

"I got fed up."

"A bachelor with a week in a city after all this, eh?" He waved his hand toward the window, and again that hard smile twisted his mouth. "Listen, Wyatt; you missed somehow at the Rio. Maybe Miss Thrale screamed. At any rate, she came out of that alley all torn up. We checked her driver, too. She got away from you somehow. And the body of an unidentified man was found in the San Eliseo River, not far down from the Rio, a few days later. We guess he might have helped her get away, held you off and then got his."

"I told you about that fight."

"But nothing about a dead man."

STEVE marveled at that, remembering. In the confusion of his mind, with the constant hammering at him and with his eagerness to tell all that had happened quickly, he had left that part out. It seemed dumb now; but there it was. And telling it now was —too late. Desperately he tried to think what else he might have forgotten in the panicky maze his mind had been in. His head hurt furiously; one thing slid into another with a fuzzy hiatus left completely unremembered.

He became suddenly ugly with the unfairness of it.

"I'd like to see a medical officer," he said harshly. The hell with trying to be decent, he decided. "I don't feel well. I demand the right to see a doctor."

The F.B.I. man studied him coolly. Steve Wyatt saw a quick change come into his dark, hard eyes. He said evenly, but with a hint of triumph in his voice:

"Now you're running true to form, Wyatt."

"I didn't have to answer your question. I did it because I have nothing to hide. But I've had no sleep for thirty-six hours, and I'm—"

Kirk Rhule came into the room. His face was very pale.

"I just heard about that letter," he said. "I want to see it."

The F.B.I. man said, smoothly: "Well, Colonel—you see, that's evidence."

"It was found in a picture of mine, I understand. You see where that might place me."

"We've considered that, of course. But after talking with General Thrale, I think you can set your mind at rest. . . . Perhaps later?"

Steve Wyatt felt a strange, light feeling come over him, a great wave of it; then it went, came back, and his hand thrust out to the back of a chair by the bed.

"Steve!" He heard Kirk's voice as though from a far height. . . .

Steve Wyatt awoke in utter darkness. He never awoke like this at night without a reason. He lay in his bed listening, wondering. Then he heard the whispering, the scratching at the screen window close by his pillow.

"It's me: Private Pitman, Major."

He was so close to the window that he leaned toward it, saw outside the greater darkness of the man's head.

"What is it?"

"Quiet, Major. They've got a guard in the front room. He just looked in. He thinks you're asleep. Get dressed and meet me at the quarry near the fence. It's about Miss Thrale."

Amazed, but wide awake now, Steve Wyatt listened to Pitman's warnings and guarded suggestions. There was no time to ask, to figure all this bewildering out. The kid wouldn't be acting as he was, sneaking up to an officer's house, talking as he did, without reason.

"All right," he said. "But you'd better be right, Pitman."

When the man had eased away from the window into the heavy gloom of the night, Steve Wyatt got carefully from his bed. He dressed swiftly. There was no sound in the house. He wondered about the screen window—how much noise that would

make. But it came up easily at his gentle urging, and he stepped out under the heavy-leaved fig tree that stood close to it. He crouched there listening, and he saw a sentry pass along the back road, come closer, walk along the palisade fence between his quarters and those of Joe Vance. Then he turned the corner, went onto the front lawn; and Steve Wyatt, bending low, shaken with resentment and a strange turmoil of thoughts, made his way by the garage, over the scrub-filled flat, and into the small forest of mesquite trees that grew almost up to the road.

Billy Pitman was waiting for him at the abandoned quarry. He said nothing, motioned Steve Wyatt to follow him. A quarter of a mile from the quarry, they came to the reservation fence. It was high, stiff and heavily barbed. It was also well guarded by watchmen and patrols of the Military Police. But lying dark and hidden in the mesquite, they waited their chance and made it at last to the country road. Beyond, below them, lay the quiet town, sleeping in the night.

OFF the road, in a clump of live oaks, Pitman offered:

"I got my and Bud's motorcycle hid here, Major. You can hang on in back like Bud used to do, I reckon."

"All right. Now tell me."

"We kept it out here on account of Post orders—says no cars in the Post. Here, take this." He shoved a heavy revolver into Steve's hand. "Bud's."

Steve rubbed his hand over the lump on his head. He still felt light-headed and strange to himself.

"Why the sneaking out of quarters?"

Pitman stared at him for a long moment. "They have you under guard, Major. It would be breaking arrest. Try us both."

"Under guard! What are you talking about?"

The young soldier touched his arm, looked steadily into his face.

"They hit you pretty hard, Major. You sure you're all right?"

"I'm all right," Steve said impatiently. "Except for a hell of a headache. I remember they hit me." He shook his head and closed his eyes hard. "Then. . . . But that was in the morning, Pitman. How long—"

The soldier said swiftly: "You *sure* you're all right?"

"Yes."

"Then look, Major: No time now to explain. But you know they took Miss Thrale and her friend. We got to go get them. You want to do that, I know for sure."

"Yes. Why haven't the others—What happened?"

"After they got you, they never paid me any more mind. I tried to see you, and they threw me out after asking me a few questions. And I don't

take things laying down, Major. Me nor my brother never would. They gave the troops the day off. So I went and got busy. No use going to them cops and having them stick me in the mill. So I came to you. I knew where you were. Grady came off guard around your house, and he told me. He was sore, and he didn't see any harm in it."

Steve shook his head again. Was it possible that a whole day, maybe longer, lay a blank behind him? But here, by this waiting motorcycle, was no time to thresh it all out. This kid had something to do, and he was a smart kid.

"What about Miss Thrale? They didn't find her?"

"You and I are going to find her, sir," Pitman said with grim conviction. "You know I talk Mexican. And I know this country now like it was back home. Bud and I was always great ones for exploring—and making friends about. I been busy all day. I figured them people who took Miss Thrale wouldn't dare try the road back to San El. Nor over into Mexico. That means they have to lie low inside of a circle they could make in a car, quick. And they've got to have some kind of a car that no one would look at twice."

"Yes. But—"

"I found out by asking in the town. You know Gordon, that sells vegetables and stuff in the Post? He's a friend of mine and Bud's. Last night one of his light delivery trucks was stolen. Nobody would look twice at them. My guess is that these people hid their own car and used Gordon's. And I found a Mexican sheepherder who saw that car, Major. It went across the mesa and got onto the county road right by us in that scout-car this morning."

Steve was listening intently now. "Go on," he said.

"The rest is just something I've been studying, Major. You know that old mine they tried to work for lead and zinc up by Crystal? There's a big flat place there. They used to talk big about flying ore out because there was no railroad. No roads."

"I've seen it from the air."

"Bud and I have been up there. They could hide good up there, Major."

Steve Wyatt stared at the dim, intense face. This kid wasn't twenty yet. And he thought, watching that sturdy figure, immobile, full of his own uncompromising idea: Thank God for them—Billy—Buddy Pitman and the tribe they represented.

"Come on, Billy," he said quietly.

It was an awful ride, even the part on the fairly decent dirt roads in the back country. But when they came to the hills, Steve Wyatt thought he

would be hurled from the twisting, bucking machine. He held on grimly, his hands stiff, his head bursting with the pain that had kept with him, but that now was growing so that at times he seemed to lose all connection with himself except for that pain. That was himself.

Billy had put out the headlight long ago. He had left the faint trail. Now they tore through mesquite; cactus stabbed at them; rocks rose smashing at them. At last the engine died. Billy threw a sturdy leg out to steady the slowing machine. He said in a low, thick voice:

"Far as the train goes, Major. Any closer, they might hear us." He pointed upward where the dusty edge of the high hills lay against the faint stars. "You follow me, sir."

Steve had worn tennis shoes with his shirt and slacks. He had been stiff with the cold as they tore through the night; but now, after a few minutes' climb, sweat began to pour from him. Grimly he kept pace with the steadily moving trooper, and once again he marveled at the stamina of these men. Too young for war? Ah, not boys like this. No sleep for two nights, and at it every minute! Twenty miles of fast marching, and by his own account ranging the countryside all the past day.

AFTER an hour of climbing, Billy paused, lay down behind a rock. He turned, and his face was dim; but Steve felt as though he could see each shade of light in the steady eyes. He said quietly:

"You see, Major, why I got to make this work."

"I know you want to, Pitman. As I do."

"But I've got more reason. It isn't just what Miss Thrale did for Maw. I've got to tell you: And I know they're going to try me for it—kick me out of the outfit. The only thing—" He stopped, and Steve knew something had stuck in his youthful mind that hurt him into speechlessness.

"Tell me, Billy."

The eyes regarded him for a long while. "Maybe you won't want to do it, sir. But—if maybe I get it up there, I wish would you forget to tell it. So they won't think I'm a—you know, not a good Ranger. You see, I fixed it for Miss Thrale to jump. I know it was wrong. I lied to Sergeant Sweeney. Told him Claiborne was marked duty because he begged the doctor at the last minute so he could make the problem. And I got Claiborne's outfit and gave it to Miss Thrale. It was dark out there at the airport, and Sweeney thought Claiborne joined us there. You couldn't tell because she's a tall girl—about Claiborne's size."

"I figured something like that, Pitman. You'll have to take your punishment, of course. But right now—"

"But it's account of that all this happened. Makes me to blame. Makes me feel—" He turned his head away, and at the choke in the young voice Steve felt a quick surge of pity for him. He touched his shoulder.

"I'll see what can be done, Billy. And if—" He nodded toward the grim mountains and said: "No one will know then. I promise you."

They moved out, and at last came to the first edge of the mesa. From behind a cluster of rocks young Pitman pointed out a dark up-thrust and whispered:

"The 'dobe house they used for the mine boss. The shaft's over yonder. No sign of life, 'pears like."

"How would they get up here in a truck?"

"They wouldn't. They ditched that back in the brush. Dragged them poor ladies up here, Major."

Steve felt a wave of ugliness. It was an awful climb. Dragging, as Billy had said, would be the only way. He was scratched and torn himself, his clothes in rags.

"All right, Billy. I'm going in. You cover me."

But the trooper had him by the arm, holding him. "Please, Major. I'm to blame for it. Let me—"

"That's an order. You cover the rear, but stay out. And watch how you shoot. Don't fire unless you're sure it's a man and he is away from the others. Do you understand?"

Billy had his revolver in his hand now, and Steve could imagine the wild eagerness in him. Personally he wished he had a club, a good baseball bat. But then he thought: all this for nothing, most likely. There wasn't one chance in a thousand that they were here. That chance rested only on the fact that of all places in the area, this would be the most likely. But how would such people have known of it? Billy and his roving brother, yes. A few sheep-herders. He himself would never have remembered it. And besides, it smacked too much of the melodramatic. A deserted mine! Why, any obscure shack would have been safer, less likely to attract suspicion. . . .

Bent low to keep off the skyline, he went toward the shack. He held the gun in his hand, but he meant to use it only as a club if need be. There was no sound. Or was there? It seemed to him that something, some vibration came to him as he eased over the rocky ground, his eyes intent on that 'dobe house ahead.

He came to a pile of mesquite firewood, ragged, worn by the weather now. He could see no trace of smoke from that awkward chimney, no pin-

point of light from the boarded windows. He drew in a deep breath, crept forward. The place was closed up, he noticed, as he circled it. He saw no sign of Billy, but he knew that he too was circling from the other side. He was close enough now to the front of the building to see in the gloom that a heavy wooden door was closed tight. Somehow he had to get through that door, and with the sound of its opening, have whoever might be in there covered. But—he already felt a little shame at the thought—that would be, most likely, a rat or two; maybe a few blinking, clinging bats. . . .

If the door was barred, and if what might be in there *was* in there—it would be bad. In that case, he must lie out here alone, while Billy Pitman made the long trek back for help. Lie out here behind that woodpile with the guns, holding them in that shack. The Lone Ranger! He almost chuckled, still ashamed of himself.

He got up, walked to the door. There was no sound—or was there a sound? He stopped, his heart beating high and hard as he listened for that sound. Distant, it seemed; not of this shack, this high place in the hills. . . .

He pushed on the door. It gave. It creaked with its age, with its disuse; but it gave. There was a small pencil flashlight in his shirt pocket. He took it in his left hand; in his right was the huge old pistol that once had belonged to Buddy Pitman. . . . Buddy, who had had bad luck.

Steve stood away from the door, pushed it still more. Dead blackness lay inside. Soundlessness. He threw the door wide, held his left arm far out, snapped on the flash. He saw the dirt floor, the far 'dobe wall, the end of a wooden table, in the narrow, dull beam. He went into the room in two quick strides, swung the beam about in a swift arc.

HE saw Mallory Thrale. She lay on a wooden bunk in a corner, and her eyes were wide and distended in the light of the flash. A corn-husk pillow was behind her head, and her face was bruised and scratched. She said no word; just stared at the light.

There was no one else in the room. "Miss Thrale!"

He went to her, put his gun in his left hand and his right under her body. "Miss Thrale!"

And then, as he lifted at her, he saw that she was tied down; strips of dirty blanket were bound across her body, her legs, her mouth.

He tore the gag from her.

"Put the light out! Quick!" she said, and her voice sounded like some cracked, rusty, mechanical thing.

He pressed out the light, tore at the bindings—dragged her from the bunk.

"They're outside," she said in a cracked voice. "They'll kill you. They've got guns. They beat Brenda awfully, then dumped her out of the car. I don't know where. What is that?"

And then he heard the plane overhead, and he knew it had come in fast, was circling. He drew her to her feet. "Can you walk?" But he knew she couldn't—that life, for the moment, was gone from her bloodless limbs. He carried her out of the shack, ran with her to the woodpile. He laid her down, his gun ready, his eyes watching into the dark.

Where was Billy Pitman? He dared not call.

"Don't go. They'll kill you, I tell you." She dragged at his arm to hold him.

"How many are there?"

"Two. The same who—"

Off beyond the shack, Steve Wyatt saw a light go on, another. They were flares, and they were set to mark the landing-space for the incoming plane.

"Wait here. Keep absolutely still." He shook her off and ran to the rear of the house. He could see the landing-light of the plane now as it groped for the field. He began to run. Something loomed up in front of him, and he thought it a rock, attempted to dodge. And then, as it moved, he thought it was Billy Pitman. But it not Billy Pitman, and he ducked just in time. Flame leaped from the blackness of that bulk, and a bullet tore across Steve Wyatt's neck. But he plunged in, struck hard with the heavy pistol, and the man went down. He struck again, and the man lay still and unmoving on the ground at his feet.

He was on the level field now, and the plane was tearing across it, its wheels down, the dust flying up in a murky cloud about its lights. He could hear nothing above the sound of that motor—not even his own voice shouting out to Pitman.

He dodged that racing sheaf of light, and watched, timing himself. The plane would stop close to him. Already it had overshot the field proper. It might even crack up. But he had forgotten that this was not a fast-landing combat plane. He saw now that it was a light commercial cabin ship, and watched it swerve as the pilot braked it sharply. It wasn't more than twenty yards from him when it came to a stop.

The motor idled, the window slid back.

"Franz!" a voice called into the darkness.

The door opened, and a man in a suede jacket, loose slacks, no hat, jumped down, came toward Steve as he crouched by a clump of mesquite.

Steve worked behind him as the man stared about him into the darkness. There was no time, no reason for tenderness here. Steve Wyatt struck the man from behind, hard, at the base of the neck with his gun-barrel. The man went down, slid down, it seemed; and then Steve heard the rapid sound of shots from far down the field.

He saw Mallory Thrale running in to the yellow-white glow of the plane's lights. She was calling to him, and her hair was loose, gleaming like red gold in the light behind her.

"Major Wyatt!"

She saw him then as he stepped into the light, and she came to him. He put his hand on her arm. "I'm all right. But young Pitman is down there. I've got to—"

THERE was the sound of another shot, and then a wild cry—a Texas cry of triumph. Steve Wyatt called loudly into the night: "Billy!"

"Right here, Major. I got the—Wait till I see—"

He came into the light, running, grinning a little later. "We shot it out, Major. A regular duel! If it wasn't so dark! Why, in daylight I'd have—"

"Where is he?"

"Miss Thrale!" He was staring at her, and his young eyes had sobered. "You hurt? Did they—"

"She's all right, Billy. Where's your man?"

The boy grinned and jerked his head backward. They saw the man then. He'd been dragged like a hunter's kill, and lay now inert, face to the ground.

"I only creased him. The way I felt, we want these *hombres* to talk."

A nice conceit, Steve decided, and saw no reason to spoil the kid's tale.

"All right. Let's get them together in the shack. Then, Billy, you've got to take a trip. I don't envy you riding that motorcycle back."

Mallory Thrale had been staring at the plane. Now she turned and said calmly: "Why a motorcycle? When we've got this?"

"If we could fly it," Steve said.

"I've flown several just like it—if you want to take the chance. While the flares are still burning."

"Well, I'll be dogged!" Billy Pitman said awesomely. "I'll take a chance."

"And you?" She grinned at Steve Wyatt.

"I've taken worse chances."

"I sure do thank you, Miss Thrale," Billy Pitman said earnestly. "That's a tough ride back."

"And I thank you," she said soberly. "Both of you."

Steve looked at her there in the plane's light. Her head was up, her

eyes bright with feeling. She still wore the paratroop clothes of Private Claiborne, torn and ripped now. Her face was swollen and smeared with dried blood. And she had taken an awful beating in accumulated fright, anxiety and a growing danger. But here she stood, ready to go, her body erect, her senses alert. Ready to get into a strange plane, take off from a rough, night-obscured field, fly through that night to a field also dark and dangerously guarded.

"You sure you can fly this thing?"

"I've got a pilot's license," she said a little stiffly.

"I was thinking of you, coming into an Army field. They've got—"

"I know. And this has a radio. I'll contact them. I know how." She smiled again, and he nodded.

"Let's get going, then. Pitman, here, says I'm under arrest."

"Arrest?"

"I can't tell you any more. I don't know any more."

"Then let's go," she said quickly.

"Soon as we gather up our kill," Billy said happily.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

STEVE WYATT blinked his eyes, tried to keep them open. There was a dim light burning near. He turned to it, and saw that it was his own shaded bed-light. His mind groped mistily. He was heavy with sleep, but his brain was lightening sharply, alert at last as the beginning of memory came back. The plane. . . . He was riding in it; and then—nothing. He started up in the bed. And then he heard the murmur of a voice, saw the eyes bent down on him. Anxious eyes.

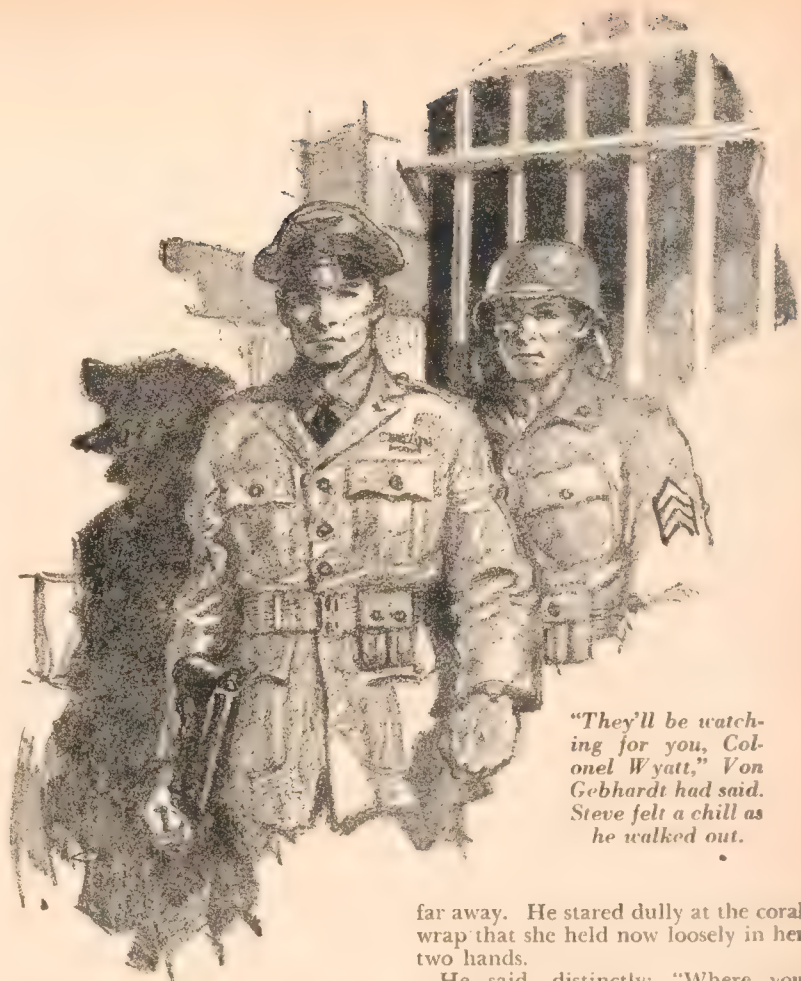
"Miss Thrale!"

He felt her hand cool on his head, saw the sober smile on her face.

"I'm something of a nurse, too. You simply passed out in the plane. I was so worried about you! I brought you right here. I've just called the doctor."

"How—you brought me right here? Didn't they—"

"That could wait a few minutes. You see, we were simply three paratroopers landing. With our kill!" She smiled again. "They're in the guard-house now. All alive, it seems. Billy handled that. They let me take a car at the field, and I hoped I might see Kirk here first—find out about this queer story of Billy's about you being in arrest, before they harass you with that aching head. I tried to get my father on the phone from the field, but—You're shaking!" She held his wrist, and her eyes darkened with anxiety. "Wait—where are your blankets? I could find only this thin spread."



"They'll be watching for you, Colonel Wyatt," Von Gebhardt had said. Steve felt a chill as he walked out.

He smiled weakly at her. He was chilled, all right. Shock, he supposed. That damned crack on the head. It was giving him hell again. He jerked his head toward the closet. "Put away in back there on the shelf since last winter, I think."

She left him swiftly, flung open the closet door. He watched her, odd-looking in her coveralls; yet the lines of her graceful figure showed even under the rough material.

"Is there a light here?" she called from the closet.

"You'll find the light cord—pretty high up."

"Yes, here it is."

He saw the light glow in the closet, watched her bend forward, reach toward the end shelves. Then she stopped, stood for a moment, as though searching with her eyes. He saw her hand reach up, pause; then she turned, holding something close against her. He blinked, looked up at her.

She stood very still, and he saw that all color had left her face.

"Where did you get this?" she asked, and her voice sounded faint to him,

far away. He stared dully at the coral wrap that she held now loosely in her two hands.

He said, distinctly: "Where you dropped it. At the Rio Hotel."

She came toward him, still holding the wrap.

"That was—you?"

He nodded.

She laid the wrap on the back of a chair, turned then, and went to the closet. She got a heavy blanket, unfolded it, not looking at him, then laid it carefully over him.

She took the top end and drew it closely against his throat. "There."

He kept watching her, but she didn't look at him again. She said in a low voice: "Now you just lie that way until the doctor comes."

He said: "I didn't say anything, because—"

"You'd better not talk," she said. She gave him a brief, passing look, then turned toward the door.

"Wait a minute. Please! Are you angry?"

She turned and looked at him. "You're not yourself right now. Later—"

"But I must say this: You didn't meet me. I thought—well, it angered me. And then later, when I saw you down here—"

"I understand. You thought it was a private adventure. Something I'd resent anyone but a stranger knowing. And you let it go at that."

"In a way."

"And that I was the sort who would jump an obligation—the saving of my life!"

"No, but—"

She came over to the bed, touched his forehead lightly. She looked down at him, and once again that deep feeling was shining in her lovely eyes. She said softly: "I didn't mean to go without seeing you. I had to leave early that morning. And I do thank you—for all the risks you've taken for me. If I'd known, recognized you—" She stopped and looked away. There was a soft, dreaming look in her eyes, and she said, almost in a whisper: "All you've done. How strange!" She started, her eyes alert. "I think that's the doctor."

She moved to the door, and Steve waited, listening to the sound of heavy shoes in the outer room. Damn the doctor! But it wasn't the doctor. It was Kirk Rhule, and never in his life had Steve Wyatt seen such a look on a man's face.

"Kirk!"

Rhule stood in the bedroom doorway, looking at them.

"What is it, Kirk?" Mallory Thrale said breathlessly. "You look ill."

He made no sound, just looked dazedly from one to the other.

"Get him a drink, Miss Thrale. In the dining-room closet."

She started to move toward the door, and then Rhule spoke. "No. . . . Mallory—your father is looking for you. We've heard Pitman's story. They were all over at Headquarters. He's just left for your quarters. Please go."

"All right, Kirk," she said quietly. "I've sent for a medical officer. Major Wyatt has had—he's been hurt. Look out for him, will you?"

SHE nodded and left quietly. Kirk Rhule stared down at Steve.

"Bad, Steve?"

"Just a concussion, I guess. And shock; I'll be all right. What's wrong, Kirk? Tell me!"

"I'll get that drink," Kirk Rhule said. He went out; and Steve, alarmed, knew he had tossed off the straight whisky at the sideboard. He came back into the room, and his hands were shaking. He stood by the bed and said at last, in a steadier voice:

"I saw that letter—that the F.B.I. took from your shirt."

"F.B.I.!"

"You didn't read it, Steve? That letter you took from the picture?"

Steve Wyatt felt miserable, looking up into those dead eyes. So it was

a love-letter. And somehow Kirk knew of it.

"No."

"There was a civilian employee at the Post laundry who had once worked for the F.B.I. He contacted them. Found it in your shirt pocket."

"Yes? But this about me being put in arrest. Pitman told me. Why, Kirk?"

Rhule passed a hand over his eyes. "That blow you got on the head—you must have come out of it when Pitman called you tonight. Forgot everything except up to when you got hit. Happens with some concussions. After that—" He went on talking in a low, monotonous voice, and Steve Wyatt heard with wonder all that had happened up until he had left the house with Pitman earlier this night. With the story his anger grew, but watching those dull lifeless eyes and those shaking hands of Kirk Rhule, he said no word.

"And so," Kirk said at last, "I went over to the Post hospital to see you. Pitman gave the impression that Mallory had taken you there, completely out. The F.B.I. Special Agent in Charge fell for it, and so did the General. They didn't check, because it was evident that you were in the clear, and the General left for his quarters, to see Mallory. So I guess they'll leave you in peace for the night. Those F.B.I. men know their stuff and when to use it."

He looked away then, and for an instant his eyes went around the shabby room. At last they came back to the man on the bed, and for the first time there was life, feeling in them. He held out his hand, and Steve looked at it curiously. Then Kirk reached over, took his hand that lay on the blanket and gripped it hard.

He looked as though he were going to cry, Steve thought in wonder.

"What is it, Kirk?"

"Just—I want you to know—al-ways to remember, how I feel, Steve. You took a hell of a chance, and it nearly ruined you. I never believed you were guilty, but I was powerless to help. Thrale was—well, they had the evidence. And he's ruthless in the face of facts." He smiled wanly. "He'll tell you about that himself tomorrow."

"Did these men we brought in talk, Kirk?"

Rhule shook his head. "Not yet." He came close to the bed, looking down steadily. "And now, Steve, I've got to go to my room. Write this all up. Make it shipshape, you see?"

"First I'd like to—"

Rhule shook his head. "You're all in. I hear the medico coming now. You get a good night's sleep. And I promise you that in the morning you'll hear it all."

Steve did feel weak, and very tired. And he knew Kirk Rhule. His work came first, and the General had probably given him the job of writing up the confidential report that must come of all this for the War Department.

A young medical officer came in, looking very solemn. "Sorry I was delayed." He explained the delay briefly as his eyes went over the man in the bed. Kirk Rhule walked out, and as the medical officer asked questions, moved his fingers expertly over Steve Wyatt's aching skull, he could hear the swift beating of the keys of Rhule's typewriter in the back bedroom.

WHEN it was over, Steve heard the doctor say softly to Rhule from the doorway: "I've given him something to make him sleep. You might keep an eye on him if you're going to be up. See that he keeps covered. And call me if there's any change—" The voice died away, and as the outer door closed, once again came the beating of the typewriter keys.

Steve lay, feeling sleepless and not wanting to sleep. He looked at the pills the doctor had laid out on the table by the bed, beside the glass of water.

"I don't think I'll take them," he decided, and he wondered why. It must be that he wanted to think, to think back on this amazing day while the oddness of it was still quick in his mind. And maybe later, when Kirk got through. . . . There were many questions he wanted to ask when they wouldn't prove disturbing to the man working so steadily out there. . . .

Steve lay thinking. He felt a little better. He reached over and got a cigarette, lighted it. He lay back, drawing on it, and it made him light-headed again. But it made him think more quickly, remember. . . .

That gray look on Kirk Rhule's face. Why was that? He was released, he supposed, of this stupid arrest. And Mallory Thrale was back. Brenda was safe. No harm done the exercise. A good job, in fact. Or was it that those visiting generals had decided that, after this vicious thing, the Texas troops should not go on as planned. Miss out on the big chance because there was still suspicion of a leak?

That would break Kirk's heart, all right. All this brilliant work, study, planning coming to naught. No wonder he looked half dead.

Thinking this, Steve Wyatt moved restively on his bed. The sound of the typewriter had ceased. There was utter quiet in the other room. Maybe the poor fellow had passed out, dead for sleep. There was not even the rustle of a paper.

Steve Wyatt got up quietly. With the blanket wrapped around him, he

moved silently on his bare feet toward Kirk Rhule's bedroom. The heavy odor of pipe-smoke hung in the air; the place was blue with it. But Kirk Rhule was not asleep. He was sitting at his desk, a pistol in his hand. The hand lay on the wide arm of the worn Q.M. chair, and Kirk was looking at it with fixed and wide-open eyes.

Steve Wyatt knew without even thinking what was about to happen here. The reason meant nothing: the incredibility of such an act. . . . The blanket fell to the floor from his shoulders without a sound. And without a sound, his bare feet moved swiftly over the faded rug. He had the wrist, then the gun, before Kirk Rhule had even stirred. And then, once it was taken from him, he merely looked at the gun, lifted his empty eyes to Steve Wyatt's face and said:

"That's no good, Steve."

Wyatt put the gun in the pocket of his dressing-gown, and as he did so, oddly thought: "She put this gown on me. And I never knew it."

He said, trying to keep his voice level: "What's this about, Kirk?"

Rhule looked up with a curious directness. "You're only delaying it."

"Nothing is that bad, Kirk."

RHULE jerked his head toward the neat pile of papers weighted with a bronze horse on the desk. "That is," he said, in the same monotonous voice.

Steve stared at him, and he went on: "Read that report. It's all there. I left a note for you to read it first, then turn it over to the General."

"I don't want to read it, Kirk," Steve said quietly. "I want you to tell me."

"All right," he said with surprising readiness. "It's very simple. You see, they let me read that letter you found in back of the picture. I recognized the handwriting at once. It was from a man—not a woman, as they supposed. It could be confused with feminine handwriting, I guess. Well, I have a letter written by the same man: I've had it for years. It's the letter that caused my divorce, Steve. It had a snapshot in it, that letter—of the man who wrote it to Brenda. From Mexico City! Do you know who that letter was from? Whose picture it was?"

"No, Kirk."

A gleam came into the tired eyes. "Well, I'll tell you. At that time he was the German naval attaché to Mexico. Franz von Gebhardt. I knew him at once when they brought him in tonight."

"One of the ones we brought in?"

Kirk nodded. "The same guy you smacked in the jaw at the Rio Bar. I understand the F.B.I. thought that tale of yours fantastic. But not now."

"Are you sure, Kirk?"

Kirk Rhule nodded at the papers on the desk in their neat pile. "I'm the only one who is sure. At the moment."

"Did Brenda know about this? This man?"

Kirk gave a bitter laugh. He looked at Steve Wyatt almost humorously. "What do you think I've been trying to tell you? She was in on this from the first. That business at the Rio—then used Nancy Vance for an in down here! She put Mallory on the spot out at that house. Good Lord, don't you see it yet?"

"No, Kirk. And I can't believe it."

"No? Well. . . . Get me a drink first, Steve. Will you?"

Steve got the drink, and Rhule drank it fast, set the glass down deliberately beside the stack of papers. He didn't speak for a long moment; then he raised his eyes to Steve's.

"I've got to make you understand this, incredible as it all may seem to you. I can hardly believe it myself, certain as I am of all the facts. She's good, Steve—really good. After all that other muck, she had me completely fooled. Ready for the butcher again! My God, when I think of what I'd have let myself in for if this hadn't broken when it did!" He shook his head as if to clear it. "Well, I went over to her at the hospital, of course. The same old stuff, smooth as glass. If I hadn't had a look at Von Gebhardt—hadn't seen the letter. . . . I let her talk for a while; then I told her it didn't matter. That I understood, but it still didn't matter."

He raised his eyes to Steve again, and somehow it was the face of a desperately tired boy, stripped of every illusion, every hope. "It's not that I feel I'm to blame, Steve: it's more complicated than that. But I let her use me; unknowingly, of course—and so I had to wipe that out. Do what I could to repair the damage! And the only thing I could do now was to get the true story. So I played her own game. And I was good too, Steve. I was tender, understanding, gentle. I *had* to do it, God help me—feeling a heel. I told her she meant more to me than anything—more than my country—that I couldn't lose her again. I said I'd had a talk with Von Gebhardt before the F.B.I. men saw him—that everything was arranged. Once she seemed sure I didn't think there was anything between her and Gebhardt but love of Germany, well, she believed me. You see, Steve, her mother came from Alsace, of German stock. Brenda went back there after the divorce. And she fell for this Hitler stuff like—" He shrugged. "You've heard of other cases. Fanatic! I promised her that I'd get Von Geb-

hardt loose, that somehow or other I'd get a plane—fake military orders to a neutral South American country, and we could make the rest of our arrangements there. She thinks I'm doing all that now: doesn't know there's a guard posted outside her hospital room."

He stopped there and ran his hand over his wet face. Then he said: "You see why I have to kill myself, don't you?"

"No," Steve Wyatt said. "If this is true—"

"True! You think I'm just regaling you?"

"What did they want, Kirk?" Steve said quietly.

"My God, you haven't guessed? The time and place of the second front. They thought if they had Mallory, Thrale would crack. Either he'd tell, or he'd lose his grip and be discredited officially."

"But Brenda—the way she came back?"

"All an act. Sure, she took a beating. But what's a beating when you're playing for those stakes? She was to deliver their message to Thrale. Necessary."

"But she's lived over here—"

"On Nazi money. In a good hotel, close to one of the biggest Army posts in the country. She's given them plenty in the past years, don't worry. She could charm St. Anthony. Or was he easy?" The smile on that wet white face made Steve Wyatt feel sick. He said slowly, looking at the papers on the desk:

"A man about to kill himself isn't in the best mental state to write convincing evidence, is he?"

"I'd say he was."

"Some courts might believe otherwise. Would you want those people to escape for lack of complete, convincing evidence? It could happen."

Rhule didn't meet his steady gaze. "I could never face her, Steve. And I'd have to—don't you see? She's double-crossed me perfectly twice. It's torn me to pieces. But I couldn't—"

"Double-cross her. But you could your country?"

There was a heavy silence in the room. Wyatt never took his eyes off the harassed eyes in the dead-white face.

"Well?"

At last Rhule nodded. "All right, Steve. You go on to bed now. You have my word."

GENERAL THRALE had shaken Wyatt's hand, said a few pleasant words and walked out of the house. But Steve Wyatt felt good, almost happy. For in those few words he had asked and had been answered. Nothing that had happened would stay the movement of this airborne

command. Before the Washington generals had left, an hour before, they had made that clear.

The Special Agent in Charge had watched the interruption to his questioning with a hard but pleasant eye. Now he turned to Steve Wyatt, as though no interruption had occurred:

"Well, I guess that's all, Major. . . . No—he said Colonel, didn't he?"

"My promotion just came in. To a lieutenant-colonel."

"Well, that's fine. Now there's one thing: It sometimes works on these people. I want you to go over there to the guardhouse and talk to each one of them. To the hospital too. The women usually act up better than the men in these cases."

"Yes?"

"Just walk in and talk to them. They were fighting you personally, you see? There's personal antagonism there: with us, they're just impersonal. Remember every word they say, will you?"

"Yes."

But Wyatt got little from the three men. The flyer just stared at him out of pale blue eyes, and not a word would he say. The dark, heavy-set man who had given Steve such a battle in the darkness behind the Rio Hotel said through a hard, bruised mouth:

"I'd like to get you alone. With bare hands!"

"You had me alone. With a gun in your hand."

The eyes were like a wolf's. The heavy mouth worked malevolently.

"Get out!"

Franz von Gebhardt was a different type. He sat in his cell as though in a pleasant room, and he smiled as the Sergeant of the guard let Steve into the barred stone cubicle. He offered Steve a cigarette, and when it was refused, lit one himself and smiled through the smoke.

"Have you any idea what they plan to do with us?"

"No. I just wondered if you cared to tell me why you tried to pull such a stupid business."

"Stupid?" He tapped the ash from his cigarette, and Steve marveled at his actual calmness. These men faced death. Quick death. Already arrangements were being made to take them to Washington for trial.

"It seems to have been extremely so."

Von Gebhardt smiled again. "I wonder," he said, "if you would tell me how the young ladies are? Especially the one we turned loose. Because I'm afraid Ernst overdid it with her. She made such a row, fought and cried out and all, that he lost patience."

"Brenda, you mean?" Steve said, looking him level in the eyes. But he didn't change expression.

"I never learned her name. She was very sullen and difficult."

Steve had been warned not to divulge the knowledge they had of the connection between the two, and he wondered if he had overdone it. He asked a few more questions, but realized he was dealing with an expert here, a man who showed no personal rancor, and a man who meant to keep his head.

When he left, Von Gebhardt said casually:

"If you could, I wish you'd see that this gentleman is informed of my position." He handed Steve a paper with the names of a Washington law firm scrawled on it and smiled his charming smile. "These stupid F.B.I. men don't seem to realize they are the servants of a democracy."

Steve looked at him, started to speak, but said nothing and took the paper.

The mocking smile failed to break, and Steve went out. As he looked back through the bars, for the first time the face inside changed. The very light eyes looked like the eyes of a waiting shark. Franz von Gebhardt said:

"Perhaps you'll find out something when you make that second front attack and are made a prisoner in Germany! Your name will be on file. They'll be watching for you, Colonel Wyatt."

Steve felt a chill as he walked out between the damp stone walls.

HE looked down at Brenda Adamson on her hospital cot. Bandages were still on her cut and bruised face; one arm lay lax and very white on the bedspread. She knew now: all morning the F.B.I. man had been in this room, and stubbornly she had fought them—until at last they had laid a copy of Kirk Rhule's typewritten pages on her limp white hand and she had read what he had written. What she had said then Steve Wyatt didn't know.

"Why did you do it, Brenda?"

She looked up at him out of those long, dark eyes; and the eyes moved, going over his face.

"You too, Steve?"

"Why not me?"

She looked toward the window, closed her eyes for a long time, as though she had spoken the last words before a deathly sleep was about to overtake her.

"Why me too, Brenda?"

"Because," she said in a low voice, not opening her eyes, whispering almost, "you are the only man I ever loved."

"That's nonsense."

She went on as though he had not spoken, as though his words had not interrupted her:

"The one person it would occur to me to think of in time of trouble. The reason I came down here."

"That's not true, Brenda."

"But when I realized that you had fallen in love with Mallory Thrale—" She raised the limp hand, let it fall with an air of futility upon the spread.

"Mallory Thrale doesn't—why, I hardly know her. Just as you'd know any girl on a Post. She looks on me the same way."

Brenda raised the hand weakly and looked at him. It seemed to him that there was intense pity in that look, and he was startled by the incongruity of it.

"Not the same way, Steve dear. I became very close to her, you know. She confided in me. And you are one of the few men she dislikes. Strange, isn't it?"

He found himself feeling suddenly empty inside. "What do you mean?"

"She said you were egocentric—banal—" She raised the hand again and moved her head from side to side, as though a sudden pain of her own, some physical annoyance had caught at her, then added idly: "Rude. She particularly disliked that."

"I see."

He stared down at her in a sort of guilt of his own. What she had just told him hurt, and she knew it hurt. There was no way he could disprove it, no reason that he could see for her to lie. Even her own troubles seemed merely to bore her, rather than to arouse her to defense. He said:

"You read what Kirk had to say. Do you deny that?"

She looked up at him almost languorously, faintly frowning, as though at his naïveté. Her smooth shoulders shrugged under the silk nightgown.

"Simply sour grapes. A childish idea of revenge. And against you too, Steve."

"Why me?"

She opened her eyes very wide, as though pleading against his evident stupidity.

"Jealousy. He realized the truth when he asked me to marry him again. He suspected it that first night when he found us together: you seem to have talked him out of it at the time. I saw no reason for you to miss your promotion because of his jealousy. And I wanted you to get that Thrale girl out of your mind: I knew she was on it. Better to let her tell you herself. Then—" She sighed and gave him a long deep look, reached and took his hand.

"What about that letter in the picture?"

Her fingers tightened on his, and she closed her eyes hard, as though in pain.

"Please! Even you, Steve. And my head—it's like—" She dropped his

hand and passed her hand stiffly, stroking again and again at her forehead. It was damp under the bandage, and Steve could see the faint lines that had seemed to come from nowhere there.

"That letter. How do I know? He kept the other one, he says. That shows the hate that lived in him. Perhaps he forged the thing. How would I know? My name wasn't on it. They showed it to me. It was to some anonymous 'darling,' and had to do with getting Mallory Thrale to some place off the Post; for their convenience."

He stared down at her in wonder. He tried to think of what more he should say when she smiled up at him, and he wondered again at the plea in that smile.

"Darling—do something for me?"

"Yes?"

"I've simply got to sleep. I've been bedeviled all day. And the beating those men gave me—" She shuddered. "No chance last night. Go over to Nancy's. There's a bottle of Eau de Cologne in the small bureau drawer. The upper left, I think. Please bring it to me. It's the only thing that ever makes me feel better when I have a head like this. Before you came in, I had them call Nancy, but she's being questioned; and I don't want that cook nosing about my stuff."

It was the best way out. His own head was bothering him, and he had had enough of this *Alice in Wonderland* talk. He made his way from the hospital quickly and found the Vance house deserted. But the cook knew him well and let him go upstairs. He stood a moment looking at the picture of Kirk Rhule still on the bare-looking bureau—the other was gone as evidence; then he found the bottle of cologne and hurried back to the hospital. She wanted to get rid of him, and he wanted to get rid of her. He gave the bottle to an orderly and went back to his quarters.

The F.B.I. man smiled when he reported.

"You were never cut out for Intelligence work, Colonel," he said.

THE trial was held in Washington. Steve Wyatt, busy with the training of his regiment, was not called until near the end. He and young Pitman were flown up together. The boy had never been out of Texas, and his excited comments on the passing scene kept Steve's mind off his own troubled thoughts.

Kirk was already in the city, and Steve shared his hotel room. Mallory Thrale had left with her father on hurried orders the day that Steve had called on Brenda Adamson in the hospital. He had not seen Mallory since that strained moment, years ago it seemed when she had walked out



"Kirk gave that picture to me, Miss Thrale."

of his quarters with the coral wrap in her hands.

A great deal had happened since then; and as he greeted Kirk Rhule in the small hotel room, he felt helpless to start the talk. Rhule still looked pale and very thin; but his eyes lighted up with his greeting, and Steve felt better.

Kirk talked pleasantly enough. In fact, it seemed to Steve that the strain finally had eased in him as he puffed quietly on his pipe and talked of the early part of the trial. Mallory, he said, was staying with her mother; the Vances were visiting friends on the Post near by; the General was busy at the War Department and things seemed to be shaping up well.

"You and Pitman will clinch the thing, Steve. They'll all get the chair. The background is well built up. It's simply amazing the way those F.B.I. people have worked this up. They've rounded up a dozen others, as you may have read in the papers. They were just watching them until they got to the head man: Von Gebhardt." He drew on his pipe, tapped it with a finger and then looked up. His eyes were steady and his voice calm.

"The amazing thing—and they admit it, too—is that they never tabbed Brenda with any of them. She was so important to them that they never were with her. Just letter-writing—they've checked her phone-calls, wires and everything else. Even at the Rio that night, she went alone. They'd heard Mallory at the hotel desk, asking where the Rio was, and they trailed her there. Even had a room near hers at the Palms."

He looked down at his pipe again, and Steve said awkwardly:

"I've hated to think of it, Kirk—dreaded meeting you since it happened. But—"

Rhule looked up, laid his pipe aside. "Then let's say it and then forget it. You innocently gave Brenda the bottle of 'cologne' that she killed herself with. If you hadn't, someone else would have. She had it for that purpose, and you happened to be"—he smiled raggedly—"what you would describe as the stooge. It was better that way, Steve. Better for her, and better for me. And it doesn't hurt the evidence in the case, because she never would have talked. Might even have got out of it with that—that way she had."

He stopped talking then, reached out for his dead pipe. And Steve Wyatt knew what he meant.

("What I was too dumb to think of myself," he thought. "Because, had Brenda testified, her marriage to Kirk Rhule would have come out. And why bring that shame on him?")

"Now let's go out and fight our way into a restaurant," Kirk said,

smiling. "I think I'll have some good news for you later, after I've seen the General."

STEVE WYATT stood on the deck of the huge gray transport. Fog was drifting in through the harbor mouth, damp and chill from the sea. There were no lights, and the muted ship sounds, the swirling fog, made him think of a movie he had once seen, called "Outward Bound."

He shivered and walked toward the forward part of the ship. It was moving now, groping with deliberate care through the channel that would lead it to the utter blackness of the sea.

Shadowy figures stirred about him; seamen putting the final touches to their allotted tasks before the sea was met.

The wind struck him as he reached the fore-castle head, and he crammed his hat closer to his ear and lifted the collar of his short coat. It would be cold out there: colder than anything he had known in Texas. He thought of his men below-decks: smiled as he remembered the face on Billy Pitman as he caught his first sight of the bay. Most of them had never seen the sea, would not in its reality see it until the morning. And then this great ship would be rolling, pitching; and many of them would be thinking of those laurel-covered Texas plains with pangs of nostalgia.

He drew in the cold, stimulating air and stared over the bow of the ship. She was feeling the sea now; and he, for the first time in these last rushing days, was feeling a great let-down. For the packing, the entraining, the long, wearing shunting and banging of the cars, the monotony of the haul half across the country, had been trying on all of them. Then the unloading, the loading of the unfamiliar ship; the stowing of the needed gear and the billeting of the men. . . .

But the spirit of their quest was ever uppermost in their minds: the pride in their outfit. You could see it shine in their eyes as they stopped at stations on the way, looked out at the curious people privileged by accident to see their tanned young faces staring out at the unfamiliar scenes.

THEY were going to war: they were ready for war. These two things they knew, and it kept their pride at its peak. And he, their leader, felt a deep, stirring pride whenever he looked at one of them, heard their high, drawing voices, listened to their homeland songs.

Faintly, from below, now he could hear the throb of a guitar. He drew closer to the open hatch, listening. It was Shane: he knew that guitar. "Deep in the Heart of Texas." They never tired of it; and now it was transported

from the dry hot winds of Texas to the fog-wet winds of the sea.

It reminded him of Mallory Thrale—not as he had last seen her, but of that night under the moon by the pool: when they had sat together under those trees, listening for the first time together to this rushing song.

The last time he had seen her, she was at the Washington airfield to see her father off to Fort Comanche after the trial, conviction and death sentence of the Nazi trio. He and Kirk were going on the bomber too, and she had shaken hands with each of them and smiled a good-by. But there had been no chance to talk with her alone: nothing to say, had there been a chance. For liar as Brenda Adamson had proved to be, what she had said about Mallory Thrale might easily have been true. Her actions had indicated it: and knowing it, he had seen no reason to seek her out in Washington and bore her further with his—what was it?—banalities, rudeness, ego. . . .

The screened harbor lights slipped by, and the great ship rose steadily, high, to the ground-swell. A great void of darkness shut in on the ship, the fog isolated it, and Steve Wyatt felt alone except for the faint beat of that guitar.

He turned at last, groping back along the moving deck. He had had a hard day, and tomorrow would bring its work like any other day. He might as well turn in. . . .

He found his room at last in the unfamiliar blacked-out passageway, opened the door and saw that a light was on. The one chair in the room was occupied, and he saw a uniformed back, above an unfamiliar headgear.

He closed the door against the light, stood staring at that head turned.

"Miss Thrale!"

She looked at him, unsmiling, nodded.

"Have you seen Kirk?"

"He was in his room a little while ago."

She stood up then, and he saw that she wore the uniform of the Red Cross nursing corps.

He looked about the room, and he felt his face reddening as her eyes rested for a long moment on a picture on the small built-in chest of drawers against the bulkhead.

"I understood this was his room—that you shared it."

"It was assigned that way. But they found they had an extra room. Kirk took that."

She was looking at him steadily now. "I see," she said. "But he forgot to take all his things?"

He looked at the picture again—remembered swiftly and ashamedly how that picture came to be there. Packing up at the Post, Kirk had

picked it up from his dresser, held it out to him as he said:

"You've never fooled me, Steve. As you would say: it's none of my business. But you'd like to have this, wouldn't you?"

"Kirk gave that picture to me, Miss Thrale," Steve said now—and he felt helpless as he stared back at her.

"Gave it to you?"

He nodded dumbly.

They stood looking at each other for a long moment, and Steve Wyatt thought that never in all his troubles had he been more embarrassed. He could think of no way out of this mess. Then she said quietly:

"Why?"

He answered at last, desperately. "Because I wanted it—asked for it. I never thought I'd see you again, or that you'd ever know. Brenda told

me what you thought of me." He repeated exactly what Brenda had said, and then he went on grimly: "So I saw no use in boring you further."

She had come closer to him now, and was looking at him curiously. She said, in a low voice:

"And you still wanted my picture?"

"Yes. I still wanted it."

"Why?" There was a deep, questioning look in her eyes, and he felt empty, helpless but unable to turn away from her.

"BECAUSE I loved you," he said hoarsely.

"Do you still love me? Because I love you, Steve Wyatt. I've loved you from the moment—"

The ship gave a great lurch at the first blow of the open sea. Mallory Thrale fell toward him, and he held

her, looking down into her shining eyes. The stateroom door jarred open. Kirk Rhule's head thrust through. He stood with one foot still on the sill, staring at them, and Mallory Thrale said:

"Come in, Kirk. I'm just explaining my new job in England. And how I barely made the boat. And remembering how—"

Kirk smiled, took his foot from the sill.

"How the stars shine bright in Texas," he said, and he closed the door. They heard him whistling the song as he moved off down the passage.

Mallory Thrale looked up at Steve Wyatt. She lifted her face, a tremulous smile on her lips. She said softly:

"Yes—how the stars shine bright in Texas, Steve."

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

THIS type of crossword puzzle employs clues of various types, mixed in with the definitions of the words. For example, anagrams: "Pieces of eight" defines *specie*, of

which word *pieces* is an anagram. Hidden words spell out the defined word as parts of other words: *Hide each plan* defines *idea*. The enigma type of definition plays on the

syllables in a word: "I put in ad for help" is *aid*, since "I" is put into "ad." Puns, backward spellings, and straight dictionary definitions are also used. (Solution on page 112)

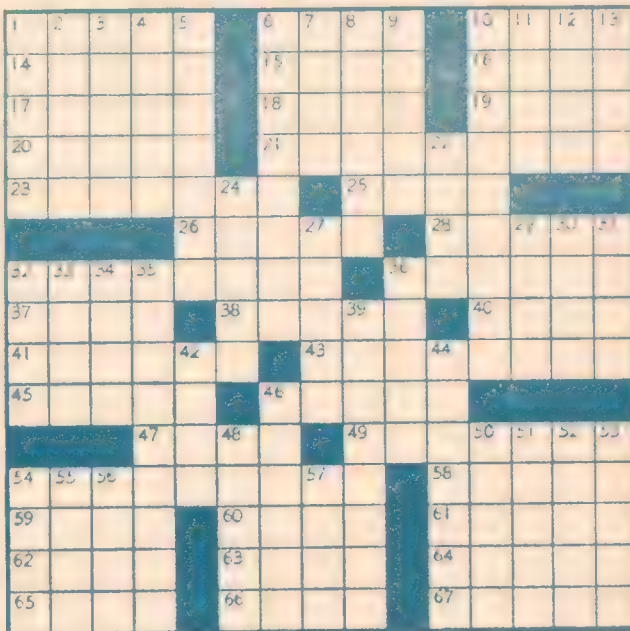
ACROSS

- 1 Ump ends ball team's decline
- 6 Confused after being stripped of an article
- 10 Good hope for holding the pace
- 14 Erwin (Rommel) in cafe society
- 15 Irish rose cultivator
- 16 Maturer man is all the rage
- 17 Are consuming if back in flames
- 18 The goddess of discord, by agitation, creates angers
- 19 O rib, thou madest a woman
- 20 Zeus married various times
- 21 Locating's bound to make one homesick
- 23 Tend (after before) to make believe
- 25 A town so old it sounds weary
- 26 Water wheel turns on air
- 28 Gee, AWOL and all lit up!
- 32 November selection without a plurality
- 36 A beard helps in a scrape
- 37 Ah-ee-duh
- 38 What Cadmus reaps?
- 40 Blue when confined by an illness
- 41 Sad portrait of a sitter
- 43 A body of troops for the Regent—I'm in it
- 45 Place two to make a bout
- 46 Pluck strings idly
- 47 Ship with rich cargo follows the sea
- 49 Soliman the Magnificent becomes just another Turk
- 54 Operatic music composed anew in rag

- 58 Lancelot's girl became anile
- 59 A small farm requires care
- 60 "There's a song in the air..."
- 61 Elijah's feeder, coming in on a wing and a prayer
- 62 Discharged, must return to high school
- 63 Pure Inca country
- 64 Upon which life struts and frets his hour (*Macbeth*)
- 65 Wood cuts shew their colors
- 66 Seth broke an old commandment
- 67 Release, as being released, to bring back the fisher

DOWN

- 1 Water it and make a thousand in the swap
- 2 Filer lets prisoner escape
- 3 Une to make it stick
- 4 Earn reward? Remit same
- 5 Serpent bearing gift
- 6 A wet fall
- 7 Bore a river of blood in Spain
- 8 I feast and feast
- 9 Ty gets irritable about Eastern Standard Time
- 10 Amicable grampa hid the message
- 11 Demagog's eager when Dems. quit
- 12 A Fairy gave Pericles his start
- 13 Icelander who left laden for Greenland
- 22 The gamin is hidden in a rabble
- 24 Set up a clamor to end the cohesion
- 27 In earth lay the dead—ah, gone!



- 29 Neal and Lena in a lovers' way
- 30 I nod, though a god
- 31 Come weal, come woe from whipping blow
- 32 Puts in the middle of a taster
- 33 Reliable, but lost bale of money
- 34 Tied to a desk job
- 35 Spanish rattlers
- 36 He could keep 100 eyes on his sugar
- 39 Note aura around the flyer
- 42 Ripped out a conic section
- 44 I, Mesmer, will absorb you
- 46 With cheerios rising at the end of the party
- 48 Picture business going up and down
- 50 A teal is winged
- 51 Valiant is the word for then—forces—take it away!
- 52 I mix in with glee, Lord!
- 53 Dinner fills this man, plus
- 54 Rewrite Shaw—make 1. clean
- 55 Short-change (N.G., too) and that hurt
- 56 Expand
- 57 Ira's pretensions

The Third



IN the east the dawn broke, and in the west a round moon hung just above the horizon as Bruno crossed the barnyard on his last round of the night. It was only one of many that the big shepherd had made since night had shut down; and now, according to his understanding, his tour of guard-duty was over. But if his duties had ended, his worries had not. Indeed, it appeared that his real troubles had just begun.

The sound came against the dawn breeze and stopped the big brown dog in his tracks. It was a low rumble like far-off thunder, something that rolled along the valley and over the Bates farmyard, carrying a threat in every note. Bruno's usually kindly face underwent a change. His lips drew back, and another low rumble

formed in his chest to break the peace of the barnyard air. The long silky hairs on his neck and shoulders rose and bristled. He stood half-turned to the threatening sound, his head twisted to one side, one ear cocked to catch the sound-waves; and his fangs were anything but friendly as they gleamed milky-white in the last light of the setting moon.

Bruno knew all too well the source of that sound, and all that it portended. Even the threat in the voice of a buffalo wolf, or the scent of a mountain lion, dangerous as they were, would not have stirred the shepherd dog too deeply; for to his mind, nothing walked on the prairies half so forbidding as the twenty-four hundred pounds of supercharged hate that was Titan.

Titan was the latest acquisition of Jake Ludendorf, the nearest neighbor on the west. Titan was a Holstein with angry curls of hair half-covering his eyes, and with long, curved horns, powerful beyond measure, and sharp as the quills of a porcupine.

A part of Bruno's troubles lay in the differing habits of Pa Bates and his neighbor Ludendorf. The latter invariably bought old bulls for his

Battle of Bull Run

A wild night on the old Dakota farm—by the author of "The Last of the Thundering Herd."

by BIGELOW
NEAL



herd. Pa Bates bought more expensive animals when they were young, and fed them to maturity in his own way. As a result, every so often this same problem arose: Jake Ludendorf with a ton or more of ambulating bad temper, and Pa with a young and perfectly harmless Hereford. Of course, the bull from Ludendorf's knew by way of his nose all about the younger animal at the Bates' farm, and all he

waited for was the time when Jake Ludendorf forgot to lock the door of his pen. Then he would come to cripple or to kill his younger neighbor who had no quarrel with him at all. Bruno had been through this thing before. The knowledge that it was to come again jarred harshly on the end of a peaceful night.

The secondary and innocent cause of this coming tragedy, lay in a pen

built out from a stall in the Bates' barn. His name and registry number was Orlando 22456. He was only two years old, and all the good hay and ground oats that Pa Bates had stuffed into him had produced only a short fifteen hundred pounds.

Orlando also had curly hair on his face, but it was the work of a beauty shop rather than of the gods of hate. He had horns, but they swept outward

and down, highly ornamental, but of little service in battle. By nature he preferred hay and oats and sleep to worrying about business on the other fellow's farm. He was gentle and kindly, liked to have his back scratched, especially in fly-time; and his one fondness, in a purely sentimental way, was for Bruno. Between them had sprung up one of those queer, almost weird friendships that often occur between a dog and a cow, or a bull, or a horse. Often they were together in the pasture, and Orlando's were the only heels in the entire herd safe from Bruno's teeth when he went to bring the cattle home at night. From this situation came the strange alliance of two exceedingly peaceful animals against a professional killer. The odds were not in their favor.

Moreover, Bruno's constant alert against wolves and bulls and coyotes, as well as a host of lesser predatory animals, did not encompass the list of his troubles. He had another; at times, it seemed the worst of the lot. As he stood there in the paling moonlight, his fangs gleaming, his plumed tail at the alert, a picture of dog majesty and dignity, his other trouble came out of the shadows—a white streak of female terrier weighing no more than the family tom-cat. Crossing behind the unprotected rear of the big dog, Min leaped into the air, grasped the magnificent but perpetually sore plume on the end of his tail, and swung to the limit of the tail, and a little beyond.

At such moments Bruno, although usually the soul of chivalry in the presence of a lady, lost his temper as he did now. The rumble in his breast, at first directed at the threat of the bull, changed to a snarl, and he lunged at his little tormentor without regard for sex or the discrepancy in size. But he was too big and too late. The little dog had become a continuation of the white streak, disappearing behind the house.

At that Bruno sat down, sitting on his tail as a precautionary measure. The rumble of the bull had died away. For the present, the threat remained only that. And Bruno's mood changed from defiance to simple sadness.

Why Ma and Pa Bates had brought Min and her mate Ted to the farm was a mystery to Bruno, as far as his intelligence was capable of recognizing mysteries. Min was a perpetual trouble-maker. Worse than that, she was a trouble-maker with an inspired mission and divine protection. Even though her technique was crude, she managed to keep Bruno in hot water most of the time. While he attended strictly to his business as guardian of the farm, she committed crimes

without number in such a way that the blame came all to him and passed her by. In her mistress' eyes, she was a little heroine, incapable of wrong; and Bruno was a sinner, saved from his just deserts only by his unquestioned loyalty to the farm's livestock and poultry.

On the other hand, Ted was a gentleman, so far as he went. His nose was not so sharp as Min's, and he minded his own business. He admired Bruno to the point of adoration, and in time of strife could usually be found peering out from under Bruno's front legs. Once in a long,

Ted possessed a sweet tenor. Bruno was really a bass baritone. As they warmed to their duet, a weird assortment of tiny yelps, long-drawn boo-hoos, and anguished wails drifted across the yard. The recital woke a battalion of Ma Bates' Indian Runner ducks, who slept in formation in the middle of the yard. Squawking a vociferous protest, they waddled by the house and down to the pond. At that, an assortment of roosters joined the chorus, turning on a clamor of magpies, kingbirds and the appetite of a hungry calf, which sought expression raucously and persistently.



long time the little liver-spotted terrier demonstrated real courage, but mostly his value lay in extracting weasels from places and holes too small to admit the bulk of the older dog. So far, however, his sole claim to heroism lay in bringing a marauding skunk from under the henhouse, rear end first. And even then his heroism received no citation at the hands of the master and mistress, and it was a long, lonely week before he was allowed to come into the house, or even near the front porch.

As Min disappeared behind the farmhouse, Ted came from somewhere, carrying the shell of a long-dead mud turtle. Seeing Bruno, and sensing an atmosphere of sadness, Ted put down the turtle shell and sat down beside his friend. He too pointed his nose at the setting moon; and both dogs began to blubber.

From a window the upper half of a union suit appeared, and the voice of Pa Bates cut through the clamor. The effect on the noise in general was not great, but Bruno and Ted broke off their parts suddenly, and lay down flat on the ground. It was a recognized principle of tactics under fire.

After the window slammed and the ducks had paraded from the scene, when the magpies and kingbirds had quieted down, and the calf had found its mother, daylight came. And it brought Min again.

She came from the house, carrying one of Pa Bates' socks in her mouth. Where she had found it was of little consequence, but the fact that Pa Bates couldn't find it at all was a more



Pa's heart sank. Impossible as it seemed, Orlando was out and now stood facing his larger opponent.

serious matter. The old gentleman was thoroughly exasperated when he started to the barn to milk.

Meanwhile Min approached Bruno and her mate. Both dogs growled, which proved that their instincts were right. And when Bruno, catching the scent of the sock, and knowing it belonged to the master and was unrightfully in Min's custody, suddenly charged, Min dropped the sock, picked up the turtle shell and set out for parts she considered safer.

Bruno hadn't intelligence enough to take the sock back to the house. He hadn't even enough to leave it alone. He picked it up, appeared undecided, then lay down again with the sock across his paws. That was how matters stood when Pa Bates came on the stage.

Pa Bates could do more execution with a last-year's weed-stalk than most

men could accomplish with a more deadly weapon. On Bruno's blameless hide he proceeded to exercise his accomplishment to the limit.

Ted's share in the punishment was vicarious but real. As the weed-stalk swished across the back of the old dog, Ted leaped in unfeigned agony at every stroke. As a matter of fact, because of his sympathetic nature, his sufferings were far greater than Bruno's, for the latter was fairly safe behind an armor-plate of thick hair, while the blows penetrated Ted to the core. And after it was over, Ted hugged close to the shivering Bruno and said everything a dog can say to express his sympathy. Afterward the two dogs repaired to their favorite funk-hole, a clump of weeds, and watched disconsolately while Min ate her breakfast, and theirs also, from a bowl by the back door. At least she ate as much as she could hold.

For a time the two dogs slept fitfully, jerking and twitching as their dreams became too real. Then the sun climbed high, the heat increased,

and the flies made sleep impossible. Bruno lay with his head on his paws, his eyes closed, his nose twitching to dislodge the flies. Ted lay with his nose under Bruno's shoulder.

In mid-forenoon Josephine, Ma Bates' Wyandotte hen, appeared from somewhere with a brood of yellow chicks scurrying between her legs. As she went by, Bruno opened one eye. He closed it again when the old hen passed behind the granary.

Next came Min, dragging a dish-towel. Bruno opened the eye again. He opened both eyes. But the danger passed, and Min also disappeared behind the granary. Bruno got up, turned around one way once, and the other way twice, and lay down again, gaining nothing by the maneuver. Ted, remembering a ham-bone he had buried in the garden, went to get it, but found that Min had been ahead of him. He returned and lay down with a sputtering sigh.

But now history was ready to repeat itself. A chorus of barks, and the excited scolding of a hen came from behind the granary. Bruno opened the one eye, and cocked an ear at the outburst. These alarms might mean nothing, or anything. It might be a mink, a weasel, a hawk, or even a coyote. Of only one thing could the dogs be certain: when Min



Pa Bates, with one shoe on, scratched desperately for the other.

began to broadcast for help, it meant trouble for somebody.

Finally getting reluctantly to his feet, the old dog ambled around the corner. Ted, yawning, followed just under the plume of Bruno's tail. As they arrived on the scene, Min was sitting bolt upright, her nose pointing straight up, and barking with such force that every explosion lifted her clear of the ground and turned her a quarter way around, first one way, then another. Before her was Josephine, swelled to twice her normal dimensions, her attitude threatening in the extreme.

At the edge of the arena Bruno sat down, allowed his tongue to hang out and carefully looked everywhere except at Josephine. Ted advanced a little farther, changed his mind suddenly when the irate hen turned her attention to him, and retreated to peer out through Bruno's forelegs.

AND now, obeying that ever-lucky hunch, Min ran around one corner of the granary a split second before Ma Bates came around the other. . . . One day in town Ma Bates had seen a jug-crate, and it gave her an idea. The jug-crate was something like a barrel, only it was twice as large, and being made of slats, wouldn't hold anything much smaller than a jug. Ma brought it home, and Pa Bates built a stand under it and a door in one end. In this contraption a broody hen, cooled by breezes from all directions, including straight up, might think things over until her maternal instincts fell to zero.

Here, with an old rug as a concession to comfort, Ma Bates shut up

both Bruno and Ted. As an afterthought she brought some old bread-crusts and a half-gallon crock of skimmed milk. Then she left the unhappy dogs to their hour of deepest humiliation.

That afternoon proved fully as eventful as one might expect under the circumstances. In other words, nothing at all happened repeatedly. At sundown Bruno's last hope died when the cows came home by themselves. The dogs were forgotten.

Evening, twilight and dusk and darkness. For a time fireflies held the stage, only to give way to the moon. The lights in the farmhouse went out. The moon swung overhead and started down the west. A coyote burst into song from a hill near by. Bruno and Ted actually shivered now, partly from inactivity and the chill of the night, partly from nervousness. Then from far up the valley came that rumbling roar again, that threatening far-away thunder that boded big trouble.

Instantly, before this greater problem, Bruno's humiliation was forgotten. When Titan's war-cry rang again, louder and nearer, Bruno attacked the door of his jail with a power that tore showers of splinters from the slats. But the wood was hard and the splinters small. If he won his liberty at all, it would probably be too late.

Meanwhile Pa Bates, returning late from a neighborhood gathering and several cups of strong coffee, had spent a sleepless night. The first roar from Titan had reached his ears as well. When a second and a third followed, each nearer than its predecessor, the old gentleman remembered that he

had left the door of Orlando's inside pen open.

As he hurried into his trousers, somewhat delayed by having driven one leg through the loop of his suspenders, the rumble came again. It was much closer now, and at last the insult in the challenge had penetrated the peaceful spirit of Orlando, setting up currents of anger that the young bull had never known before. Obeying the dictates of instinct, he essayed an answer. It was not very terrible, scarcely threatening; but Pa Bates, with one shoe on, scratched desperately for the other.

ORLANDO'S outer pen was, to Pa Bates' mind, a work of art. It was high and strong, built of heavy timbers. No bovine warrior could go through. And so far as the farmer knew, the gate was in keeping with the pen. Certainly the steel fixtures and the patent latch had cost enough. They should hold against all comers.

The thing he didn't know was that Min had accidentally stumbled onto the combination—once, shut in the pen by mistake, she had poked at everything with her sharp nose until she had lifted the long steel shaft which carried the locking device. Having done it once, she could do it again. And she had. Nor was she ever caught, because the gate closed itself by means of a pair of springs.

But as Pa understood it, Orlando was safe. His present mission was merely to chase the older bull away from a vulnerable garden fence, and perhaps to save the splintering of a timber or two. To such a simple end he needed little equipment, but he did need two shoes, and he could find only one.

Then came another roar—this one of the type Pa recognized as the last bugle call before a charge. It was right in the yard too; and what was more, there came an answer. Pa Bates sprang for the door in one shoe and two socks. The answer this time was full-throated and equally charged with anger. As Pa went through the screen door, his heart sank. Impossible as it seemed, Orlando was out and now stood facing his larger opponent.

Pa Bates hobbled forward, yelling at both bulls at once in a language neither seemed to understand. He had picked up a willow stick adapted to prodding cows into and out of their stanchions, but wholly inadequate to the use at hand. Aside from that, he was unarmed and going where even an armed man would have been cautious. But Orlando had cost a lot of money and a lot of feed.

Hopping forward on one foot, he grasped the ring in Orlando's nose, only to find the bull about as movable

as the side of a hill. He began to pound the young bull over the head with his stick, but Orlando took no notice and the stick flew into splinters. Then a hideous roar came from behind, and Pa glanced over his shoulder to see a ton and a quarter of Holstein fury coming like a black-and-white locomotive. It was too late now. Orlando was doomed. Pa Bates sprang away as the young bull squared himself to meet the onslaught.

Orlando was no fighter either by instinct or training. Unquestionably his first battle would be his last. No man could stop them; nothing could be done; but the Hereford lowered his snowy head and giant muscles sprang into play under the cherry satin of his back as he braced himself against the irresistible shock to come. It was all very brave there in the moonlight, but Pa Bates felt he was seeing the last of his valued bull.

The old man leaned forward, his white whiskers trembling, his helpless fists shaking at the charging Holstein. And then when it seemed that Orlando was doomed, a whole set of new actors came on the scene. Ma Bates appeared at the elbow of her husband, attired in her best rayon nightie and waving a broom. Ted shot into the picture and set out on a yelping course that was to take him round and round the combatants, mostly well out of reach. Then came a big, brown bulk, leaving the ground and sailing into the air on a nicely timed leap that launched Bruno's heavy body directly at Titan's ear.

A hundred pounds of dog would not be expected greatly to affect the charge of Titan. Nor did it. But the effect, though slight, was enough to save Orlando's life. Titan's head came a little off center, slipped over the polished horns of his smaller opponent, and instead of resulting in a bone-splintering shock, went too high, so that the Holstein fell over the Hereford and rolled end over end.

Except for a badly sliced ear on Titan, nobody was hurt, and Orlando didn't know enough to take advantage of his opponent's temporary embarrassment. Titan got to his feet, turned and launched a second assault, this one fully vengeful, but not half so dangerous, because he lacked the momentum of a long run.

Again Bruno leaped. This time he missed the ear and his jaws did more damage by accident than by intent, for they ripped open a series of gashes across Titan's eye—only skin wounds, but causing a flow of blood that put that eye out of commission for the course of the battle.

Orlando, braced and ready for the shock, took it like a veteran. Instead of his neck buckling and his legs being swept from under him, his neck

bulged under the terrific strain but held, and his legs seemed turned to stone so that he skidded backward on all four feet, raking clouds of dust from the yard. During the retreat Bruno got most of the other ear, Ted went round and round, and Ma Bates' broom continued to beat time. But most important of all, Pa Bates espied an ash fence-post and bore down on the combatants, armed with perhaps the best weapon of all. Just as the Holstein's charge lost its momentum, Pa swung the fence-post with all its might. There was a sharp crack, a roar of anger from Titan, and one of the deadly horns snapped short.

The result of Pa Bates' good timing was another effusion of blood from an equally harmless source. It waved above the head of the infuriated Holstein like a delicate tree, growing red in the moonlight. It wouldn't kill him in a thousand years, but it ran down his forehead and interfered with the sight of his good eye.

NOW Titan went literally mad with rage. Dropping his head, he charged blindly, but with better luck than when his vision had been better. His head struck low on the Hereford's nose. Orlando's neck could not stand the strain. It buckled and the Holstein went under, to crash against the Hereford's chest.

Orlando was lifted from the ground as by a slow explosion. His white head went up into the moonlight, up and over, far over and then down. He struck the ground on his back. The Holstein lunged at the unprotected stomach. Now the battle was over—or should have been, had not a combination of interferences come out of the night.

Again Pa Bates swung his club of ash. It struck across the back of Titan's head and nearly brought the infuriated bull to his knees. At the same time Ted saw his cue. It was the white plume of Titan's tail. From a running start, the little dog leaped, sank his sharp teeth through the tail,

went on to strike the ground and to roll over and over, twisting the tail as he revolved.

Titan had two highly vulnerable parts to his anatomy. Ted had found one, Bruno found the other when he dived in and got the Holstein's nose in his powerful jaws. Both dogs hung on while the fence-post continued to rise and fall with regularity.

Befuddled by pain at both ends and a rain of blows in the middle, Titan hesitated. That was the moment when Orlando scrambled to his feet and drove his weight like a battering-ram into the Holstein's ribs, and the rush of air from the big bull's mouth was of such force that Bruno loosed his hold and rolled out of the arena.

Titan went down flat on his side. Orlando struck again. Titan got to his feet by a supreme effort. But he did not charge. Instead, he turned his battered nose in the direction of home and set out at a wabbly gait with Bruno again working on his ears, Ted, eyes shut tight, still swinging on the end of his tail, and Orlando, furnishing more than his share of the transportation by ramming the rear of his enemy again and again.

They came back after a while, Orlando puffing heavily, Bruno trotting alongside, and Ted working furiously to dislodge the hairs from his teeth.

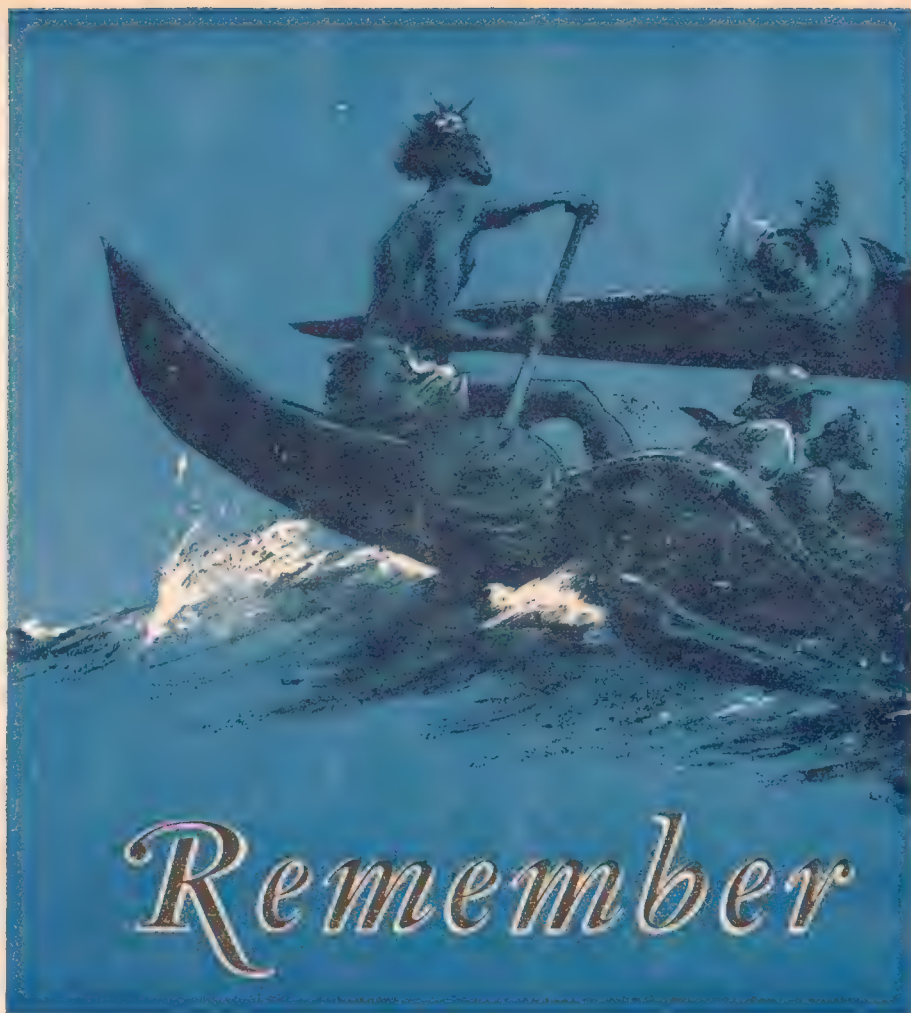
By now Pa Bates had become aware of a sore foot that everybody, including himself, had stepped on repeatedly during the battle. When Min came from Orlando's pen, carrying Pa's other shoe in her mouth, she ran into a cross-fire of belated justice from Ma Bates' swinging broom and Pa's one-booted foot. . . . Later, when day had come and the hum of the cream separator had died away, Bruno and Ted ate all they could hold of a generous breakfast, and as Pa Bates passed them with a kindly word and stooped to pat their heads, both dogs wagged their tails happily. When a yelp of extreme dissatisfaction came from the jug-crate, Bruno looked at Ted and Ted looked at Bruno. . . . They slept.

Where Min had found it was of little consequence, but the fact that Pa Bates couldn't find it was more serious.



*Strange
visitors bring
shocking news
to Little Jut,
in the far
Pacific*

*by
Manuel
Komroff*



Remember

THE giant metal bird, more powerful than the great mythical roc which carried Sindbad the Sailor into deep Arabian adventures, cast its blue shadow upon the green water beneath. The four passengers watched this little shadow of their clipper as it brushed silently across the surface of the Pacific.

From Wake to Guam, a span of thirteen hundred nautical miles, everything went well. The dark, inky waters of the temperate zone were now left behind. San Francisco was far behind. Beneath them stretched a long sea of clear, tropical blue. The surface seemed smooth and polished.

They were on the last leg of their journey, and in a few hours they were due to reach Manila. The weather was clear, and the soft purring drone of the motors added to the sleepy peace of the journey. But suddenly, without any warning, events now famous began; and—

Captain Clark left his pilot's seat and ran through the aisle to the radio

controls. The radio operator handed him a set of earphones and plugged in the wire. Little words were coming through the air—words of great importance. And now and then the giant metal bird seemed to dip and the tips of the wings tremble, as though she too could hear this message. And the message brought a shudder through her frame.

The four passengers were suddenly shaken from their sleepy repose. No longer were their eyes following the little shadow of their own plane as it brushed the surface of the ocean.

The navigator quickly unrolled a chart, and making some rapid calculations, ruled three lines. Mary Loring, the stewardess, stood beside Pilot Clark and looked searchingly into his face. A pencil-point marked a small dot on the chart. Clark nodded while still listening intently to the words coming into the earphones. The nod was enough. The stewardess went forward.

"We are landing in fifteen minutes," she said. "Hook on the straps."

The thought of a forced landing at sea brought an anxious look to the faces of the four passengers. The stewardess went from one to the other to assure them that everything was well.

"It's just nothing at all," she told Macdonald, the newspaper man who was making this clipper flight to get to Burma.

"How long will we be?" he asked.

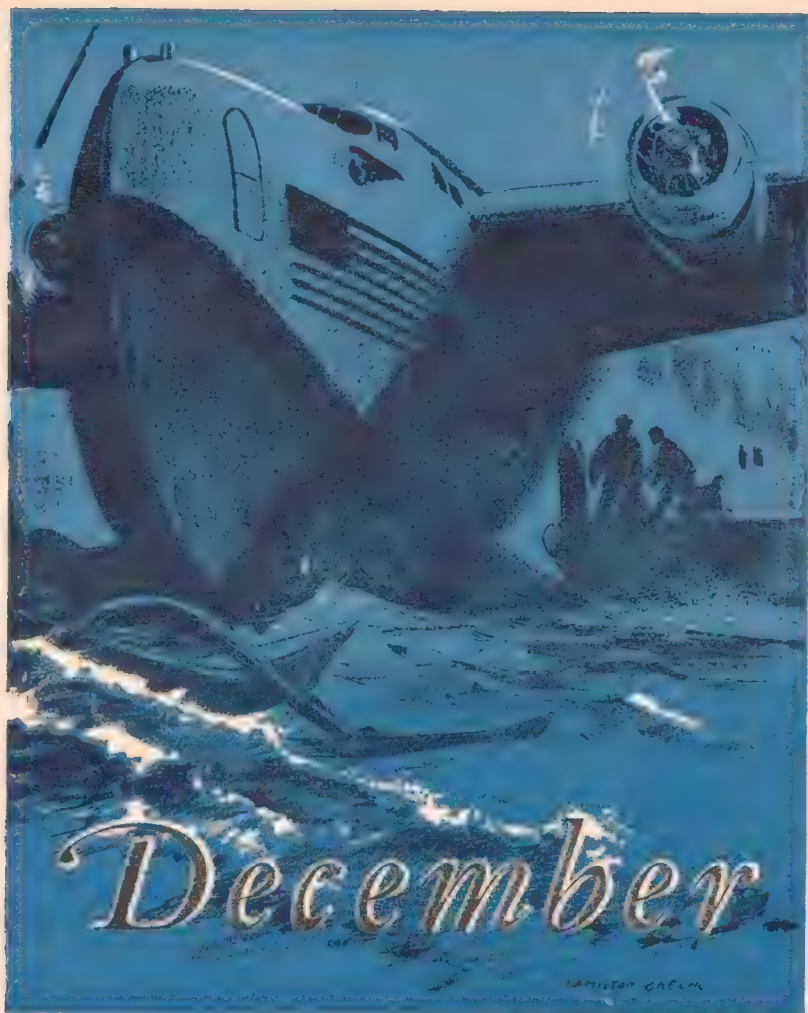
"Not long."

"Repairs?"

"No, I don't think so. There's no trouble. We're just landing to—I don't know exactly, but I guess it's to pick up someone or— Last year we had a call something like this, and it was a case of appendicitis—a little kid. We took her on to the hospital in Manila."

When the stewardess ran back to wait for further orders from Captain Clark, Macdonald turned to the other three passengers to repeat to them what she had said.

"I take it all with a big grain of salt," said Penny Fall. "I know some—"



thing serious is up. This is not my first flight."

This was true. Penny Fall had flown many hours to many parts of the world, taking photographs for several national magazines.

"Motors sound good," said the Russian in thick English.

The Chinese diplomat returning to his war-torn native land smiled broadly. "In China we say: Always be ready for the best to happen. If you are ready to receive the best, then the worst will be ashamed to come forward, and run away."

He laughed so hard that the others were forced to smile. They hooked on their belts. But as they did so, Macdonald, with the trained eye of the reporter, kept glancing at the pilot and the radio-man, who were motionless before the receiver. Their eyes seemed ready to pop from their heads, and their lips were parted in surprise.

Below them a tiny island was discovered. They could see the sand and green foliage encircled by a reef of

red coral, as though it were a jewel in a frame of vermilion worn on the full blue gown of some goddess. Here in this place, too small for ordinary charts to mark, without roads or harbor, without almost anything except the things which the good Lord had cast about; here under the great Pacific sky, on that little island paradise, the four passengers were safely landed.

The clipper came down softly and skipped along the surface of the water, throwing out great foamy rollers to either side. The anchors were ready, were lowered close to the coral reef.

Happy natives, with much shouting and running, came to the water's edge, where they launched at least fifty canoes. This hand-paddled splashing armada made at once for the distressed clipper.

The door was opened. Captain Clark gave each passenger a hand. The natives fought with each other for the honor of bringing a passenger to the shore. Once or twice Clark had to shout to them to keep clear of the ship.

Penny Fall was the first to be helped down into a canoe. The happy black natives in the canoe looked at her silk stockings and smiled broadly, showing their full white rows of teeth. They started at once for the shore.

"What is the name of this island?" Penny asked.

"Little Jut," they replied.

The Russian gentleman, an assistant Secretary of Commerce for the Soviets, was the next passenger to be helped into a native canoe. His name was Malinka. He also asked the same question.

"Little Jut?" he questioned. "What does the name mean?" The meaning of things is always important to a Russian.

"It has no meaning, sir. There is supposed to be a big Jut somewhere, but its name has been changed, and now there is no one about who knows which island had the original name."

This was the explanation Malinka received as he was being paddled toward the shore.

The third passenger to emerge from the clipper was the veteran newspaper correspondent and radio commentator Macdonald. He stepped into the small boat and asked no questions. But wherever his eye fell, he saw copy. He looked ahead of him and saw Penny in her boat being paddled toward the shore. She was very pretty, and he thought it best to keep a close watch.

The fourth and last of the passengers was the young Chinese embassy secretary who was returning to his native land with all possible speed. He seemed a little worried by this forced landing.

These four were followed by Mary Loring, stewardess of the clipper. But the pilot, Captain Clark, his radio-man and the rest of the crew remained on board the ship.

FROM the air Little Jut seemed tiny. But as you approached slowly in a canoe, you had time to discover that Little Jut had many thatched huts and quite a few buildings. Her shores were lined with little boats, and even a small dock was attached to some official building. This far-flung Pacific island was not as wild or savage as one might expect, for it not only boasted a small hotel, but there was also a white doctor, as the new arrivals were soon to discover.

One by one they were landed on the hard sandy shore, and each was greeted by a pleasant word and a handshake from old Andrew Hastings, the proprietor of Paradise Hotel. He said that it was a great honor for Little Jut to have such distinguished visitors, and that he and his wife, whom he



called "Mother," would make everyone comfortable. The natives stood about and grinned.

"Why do you stand there?" he shouted at them. "Can't you see we have visitors? We will need vegetables and fruit and fish. Hurry!" He waved his arms and sent them off.

Mother Hastings removed her apron and greeted them as they entered the main hall of Paradise Hotel. "It does your heart good," she said, "to see real people again."

Then she called one of the native boys and told him to go and bring the doctor. "Wake him up if he is asleep; and drunk or sober, bring him here. And give him a fresh linen suit from the laundry and see that he puts it on properly."

The boy hurried off to do as he was ordered.

The stewardess again repeated that she did not know exactly the cause of this forced landing, nor how long it would be necessary for them to remain. "Somewhere, somehow, something has happened."

"That's not very definite," said Macdonald.

"No," she admitted.

"But why must we land," asked Penny, "if something has happened

elsewhere? Nothing has happened to us."

"No, nothing has happened to us," admitted the stewardess quickly.

"It's a big mystery," said the Russian.

"Very much," said the Chinese diplomat.

"Nice place, anyway," added Macdonald.

"Exquisite! Perfectly beautiful!" exclaimed Penny, drinking in a full breath of the fragrant air.

"This would be a fine place for a romance," said Macdonald.

"You would just be wasting time, and you would not see anything," said Penny.

"What is there to see?"

"Were you ever on a little South Pacific island before?"

"Well, I was in France and in Germany, and I covered the revolution in Spain."

"But this is different, isn't it?"

"Yes, I guess so. But still, I don't think there is very much to see."

"Why, it's beautiful!" Penny exclaimed. "And if I can get out my camera, I hope to take some pictures."

"I would still maintain, Miss Fall, that this is a wonderful spot for romance."

"And I would repeat, Mr. Macdonald, that you would not see anything."

"But some people are not interested in beautiful landscapes. I'm only a war reporter, and I don't care much about pretty scenes."

"And therefore all you can see in this beautiful island is a good place for romance!"

"That's how places strike one. One place strikes one as a good spot for a war; another looks like a place for a disaster or a murder. And some places give one a lazy feeling, and others seem to ask for—"

BEFORE he could finish, Doctor Fitzmaurice stood in the hall of the Paradise Hotel, dressed in a fresh white linen suit. He bowed before them respectfully.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I greet you!" he said. "Pardon the delay, but I did not want to appear before you without first shaving and cleaning up. We do not often have the pleasure of company here on our little island."

Tall cool drinks were passed about, and when all were served, the Doctor proposed a toast. "As an old white inhabitant of Little Jut, I welcome you, ladies and gentlemen, to our little island. May your stay be long, for I know it will be happy. In Little Jut misery cannot exist. Everything else is allowed. Feel free to follow the dictates of your heart. Little Jut is your home; and we, Andrew Hastings, Mother Hastings and myself, are your humble servants. We will do our utmost to delay your departure, and in the meantime—" He raised his glass. "Happy days!"

All drank to the Doctor's toast.

The stewardess of the clipper sat close to the window and kept looking out toward the ship to see if any of the crew were coming ashore. The water about the silver bird was dotted with little black canoes paddled by



the happy childlike dark natives of Little Jut.

"You are sure you do not know the cause of this delay?" asked Macdonald again.

"No," Mary replied. "All I know is that somehow, somewhere, something has happened."

"Will we be going on soon?"

"I suppose so. We never are delayed for long."

The Russian made light of the forced landing by saying: "There must be a storm ahead, and the radio-man got the weather report. In the Pacific the storms come up suddenly."

"Whatever it is," said young Penny Fall, "we certainly came down without any delay and stopped dead in our course."

"We are fortunate indeed," said the Doctor. "Little Jut has proved itself a haven of refuge more than once. From the top of the old dead volcano in the center of our island we can see out for a hundred miles or more. And many a shipwrecked sailor has been saved by our natives."

The natives, who had been ordered to bring in fruit and vegetables and fish, now began arriving with baskets on their backs. They came single file, and sang as they approached the Paradise Hotel. A line of native girls with white flowers in their hair and garlands about their necks followed the men with the baskets. Their high-pitched voices sang out to the beat of several native drums.

"What are they singing?" asked Penny.

"Oh, that's just the usual song of Peace and Welcome," replied the host of the hotel.

"They're coming ashore!" called the stewardess, who had been watching the anchored clipper all this time. "Or one of them, anyway," she added. "He just got into a canoe. See!"

Over the surface of the water the narrow dugout canoe was racing toward them. And soon they could see that the lone passenger was Captain Clark himself. He urged the paddlers on with all possible speed.

At the same time the native girls were singing and dancing on the little lawn before the Paradise Hotel.

The words of the song, explained plump Mother Hastings, were only words of welcome. "'Welcome,' they say, 'to peaceful Little Jut, pearl of the sea and fragrant dewdrop of the vast salt waters. Welcome to the calm shores of Little Jut, white lamb of the salt sea.'"

As soon as the canoe touched shore, Captain Clark ran along the strip of beach to the path leading to the hotel.

The words of the stewardess still hung in their ears: "Somehow, somewhere, something has happened."

He paused for an instant to catch his breath. "Pearl Harbor!" he said. "It has come at last. And without warning. A stab in the back. We'll remember this day in December a long time."

They listened in deep silence. It was as though the sky had fallen.

Clark continued with a brief report of the attack on Pearl Harbor as picked up on the short-wave radio. He added also that the island of Guam, which they had only left at



"Yes. Two Japs. He was here last week. Landed in boat."

sunrise that morning, had also been attacked; and that parachute troops were seen floating down from the sky and landing in the Philippines. "Thought best for us to come down here," he added.

"It is war," said Macdonald.

The word "war" seemed to have an electrifying effect upon all except the dancing native girls, who continued chanting their welcoming hymn.

Doctor Fitzmaurice turned his head aside. "No place in the entire world is safe any more," he said. "I came to Little Jut for peace and quiet, to get away from it all—from people, in-

stitutions, politics and that tooth-and-nail thing called civilization. We were living in peace until this morning!"

"Yes," replied Captain Clark; "but do you realize that we ourselves are not so important as that silver bird? She cost a cool million; but to the enemy she is worth five million at the moment, and we are not giving her up so easily. I would rather dive her down to the bottom of the Pacific! And I would not hesitate for one moment to do so!"

The Russian stood close by, swaying his head as though he were in a dream. He heard little of what was being said, for in his mind one word repeated itself over and over: "War, war, war, war—"

And the Chinese diplomat also heard little, for in his mind two small words were repeating themselves: "At last, at last, at last, at last!" His lips smiled. For four years his native China had been torn by a ruthless inhuman enemy; and now—"At last, at last, at last!" he repeated over and over again.

"Just one minute," Captain Clark said, addressing both the Doctor and the proprietor of the Paradise Hotel. "Do you have a radio?"

"No," replied Hastings. "We tried to get one, but it did not work. The batteries were not strong enough. We sent it back."

"And also," continued the Captain, "are there any Japs on this island?"

"Japs? No," said Doctor Fitzmaurice. "At least we have not seen any."

"Yes—yes, two! He was last week," called one of the natives, who had been standing casually by with his fish-basket.

"What do you say?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes. Two Japs. He was here last week. Landed in boat on north shore."

"Are they here now?"

"No. Leave."

"When did they leave?"

"After short time."

"What did they do after they landed?"

"Climbed up to top."

"Stayed long?"

"No."

"What did they do from the top of the volcano?"

"Nothing. Just look out."

"Why did you not tell us this before?"

"Not important."

"Now it is important."

"Yes, now important. But last week not."

"You are sure they left the island?" asked Captain Clark.

"Yes, sure," replied the native.

"And now, at this moment, there are no Japs on the island?"

"No."

"Sure!"

"Sure."

"Good."

"Yes, good," remarked the native. "Now we watch. Everyone watch." He turned to his companions and repeated these words in his native tongue. They nodded their approval. Word would be sent about the island for everyone to be on the lookout. The natives did not regard the Japs as friends.

"We must decide quickly where we are going," said Captain Clark, with a worried look on his brow. "It is not so easy. We could push on to Manila, but— You heard the news. We could fly south and hit the coast of Borneo, or even go on to Java or New Guinea, but— There is little time to be lost. Under cover of night we might remain here, but tomorrow surely— We do not dare ask for instructions or give our position by wireless, for they are certain to pick it up."

"Instructions?" asked Malinka, the Russian passenger.

"Yes. We usually keep in touch."

"I understand," replied the Russian. "I understand everything. This is not my first trip. I suppose your instructions must now come from the United States Navy?"

"That is it exactly. But this is a commercial plane, and we have no code. I dare not send out our position."

"I understand," said the Russian. "Now it is war. And war is war. Everything is different." He paced up and down nervously.

"There is no time to be lost," said Clark. "Not even a single minute."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed the plump Mrs. Hastings. "I so hate to see people hurried. And seeing you land on our little island made us so happy. And now— It is hard to believe. I just can't believe it possible. War! And without any warning. Will they be coming here?" She spoke these last words with some alarm.

"Here and everywhere," said the Chinaman. "We know what they did in China, and you know what you can expect."

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed. "What are we to do?"

"Whatever it is we decide to do," said Captain Clark, "we must decide quickly and do it at once."

There was a brief silence as they stood about. Their faces were marked with anxiety and perplexity.

The native girls who a few minutes before were singing and dancing before the strangers, welcoming them to the peaceful island of Little Jut, now felt that something strange was in the air. One by one they ran off, until none remained. Some of the



young boys and girls, attracted by the great silver bird near their shore, removed their outer garments and jumped into the water and swam out. In a few minutes a ring of smiling faces dotted the water about the clipper.

The Russian suddenly stopped pacing up and down. "Perhaps I might propose something," he said quietly.

THEY moved closer to hear what he had to say.

"Perhaps it is all very simple," he began. "In the first place, we know that there has been an attack upon the United States. Therefore it means that the situation is now in the hands of the War Department."

"True," said Macdonald. And Clark nodded his head.

"Being a commercial plane," continued the Russian, "we have no code. To issue a straight message would at once disclose our position. Therefore that is out of the question. Now, I have a Russian commercial code, but it is not in English and could only be read by our own office. But that would be all right!" he added with great enthusiasm. "If America is in the war, then it means that our office and your War Department will work together. Now it is simple. You write out the message, and I will translate it into our cipher code, and we will send it to the Russian Embassy in Washington. They will get in touch with the War Department, and the orders will come back to us in Russian code, which I will unscramble for you. There! Is it not simple?"

Those who stood about looked at each other to see if all were in agree-

ment. Captain Clark meditated a moment, then said: "It may work."

"It is bound to work," said the Russian with assurance.

"We could try," added Captain Clark. "I would not be too sure of anything at the moment."

"Only one thing troubles me," said the Russian. "What day of the month is this?"

"It is December 7th—and long will it be remembered," replied Penny.

"Then we must figure it out carefully, because our code varies with the day of the month, and this number is important. However, I will figure it out. In the meantime, get the message ready."

Clark took a pencil and wrote the following: "Attention Russian Embassy, Washington. American Pacific Clipper landed at Little Jut unable to communicate direct without disclosing position. Please get instructions from War Department and radio reply in same code. Signed, Malinka, passenger under Pilot Clark."

When these words were written, he read them aloud.

"Perfect!" exclaimed the Russian.

He took the message and rewrote it all in Russian. Then he gave each letter a cipher. When this was done, he added seven to each number. Then he rewrote it all, placing a period between each number.

"There," he said finally. "Send it out. And tell your operator to use these two wave-lengths." He wrote the numbers of the wave-lengths on the top corner.

"How long do you think it will take to get a reply—that is, if everything connects?" asked Clark.



"We usually get replies within the hour. Don't forget that we are at war with Germany, and no Russian embassy is ever asleep."

"We will try it, anyway," said Clark.

With the message in his hand, he hurried to the shore, waving to some of the native boys, and with gestures indicated that he was anxious to be paddled out to the clipper.

Mary Loring, the stewardess of the clipper, ran after Clark and just managed to get into the canoe before it was pushed off.

"I just wanted to be with you," she said, as he turned his head to see who had almost upset the canoe.

The natives smiled broadly.

In the little Paradise Hotel, plump Mother Hastings was still wringing her hands.

"Oh, my! What will we do?" she kept repeating. "This day in December we will certainly remember."

IN the canoe Mary Loring, sitting directly behind Clark, spoke. "This was to be our last trip, at least mine. But now what will become of us?"

"Don't worry, Mary. Whatever happens, we will be together. The important thing is to save the ship. If we can get back to San Francisco, we may still keep the date. Only, you can take a smaller apartment, because in a week I will be flying for the Navy."

"I know, I know," she replied, with tears in her eyes. "I am not afraid. I only wish for two things: That we save the ship and get back to United States soil. I could not bear to live in a foreign land with the war going on. That is all I wish."

"Don't worry, Mary. We will do the best we can to save the ship."

The Doctor had not spoken in a long time. Finally he said: "I came here to live in peace. To get away from the broil of the world. Now—In my day I have been to many places and seen many things. I love people: black people, white people, little people, big people. There is nothing wrong with people. Only civilization is the thing I hate."

"But there is no civilization without people," said the Chinaman.

"That's just the trouble," admitted the Doctor.

The Russian, however, took issue with this premise. He said: "I do not agree with you. There is nothing wrong with civilization. It is the people who are to blame when they refuse to be civilized."

"How is that?" asked Macdonald.

"When people choose criminals for their leaders and are ready to follow them blindly, the fault is with the people. And the people themselves are to blame, not civilization."

"Perhaps you are right," admitted the Doctor. "The question for me now is what to do. I have been here six years. It has been a soft life. The natives have supplied the food and rum, and I have delivered all their babies. I was content. I was happy. I asked for little. And I expected to remain here for the rest of my days. Only now—"

"In one moment your entire life can be changed," said the Chinaman. "War has changed the life of every soul in my vast land."

Malinka the Russian was full of spirit. "War changes everything. A

year ago I was a professor in a little college. Now I am a Secretary of Commerce of my country. It happened overnight. In a war-torn world, peaceful islands no longer exist. Each does what is best and what he can do. If you love people as you say you do, then the path is clear before you. Every country in the world needs doctors, and your country needs you."

DOCTOR Fitzmaurice rose and gazed out blankly toward the sea. "Perhaps. But I am soft. I am weak. Six years on a tropical isle has made me lazy. And besides—" His voice grew louder. "Besides, I am not without my weaknesses. Oh, I can face it! There are plain words for plain things: I am a drunkard!"

"My dear friend, I like you," said the Russian. "I like a fellow who speaks the truth, especially about himself." His words were warm and sincere. "All right," he continued. "So you must have your drinks. What then are drinks? Drinks are nothing. Here is a war. Your own people are wounded, and they are bleeding. You are a doctor. Will you bind up the wounds now? Now, this minute! Later you can drink."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "I will. I will! And when I say I will, it is not the drunkard in me that is talking. It is that other person who started out in life liking people, all people and above all his own people."

For a moment he was silent; then he added in a more restrained voice: "Guess I better get my few things together. I hope there is room on the plane. I would not want you to leave without me."

"But we do not know yet where we are going," said Penny quickly.

"It matters not. I will go with you. Wherever we land, they will be able to use an extra doctor."

With these words he left, to return to his thatched hut and gather his things together.

DECIDING they had plenty of time, and learning that the top of the old dead volcano could be reached in fifteen minutes, Macdonald expressed a desire to climb to this uppermost spot and get a full view of Little Jut. At first no one seemed anxious to go along, but at length he persuaded Penny to accompany him.

As they left the hall of the little hotel, they could hear Mother Hastings' plaintive voice: "Now the Doctor is leaving, and what will we be doing here? Supposing we are invaded! Oh my! What will we do?"

They had no trouble finding the path which led through heavy tropical foliage for a short distance. Soon the path rose sharply, and they could catch a view of the vast blue ocean. Another step or two, and they saw the great silver bird resting outside the red coral reef.

"Guess they are sending the message with all the juice they got," said Macdonald.

"I wonder if we will get a reply and where we will be sent."

"Don't know."

They climbed higher and higher. And the higher they climbed, the more they could see spread out before them. The breeze brought them a salty sea fragrance. And little by little the slick silvery sheen of the bird was growing smaller and smaller. As far as they could see, the distance was vast; and over it all, over the blue sea, was a dome of paler blue, the sky.

They went still higher, climbing the old volcano which stood in the center of the tiny island. And as they looked out, Macdonald said: "How strange and peaceful it all seems! And yet you know and I know that the air that we are breathing is highly charged with electricity, and the words that are being transmitted back and forth are far from peaceful. The hundreds of orders, messages and sudden commands which now shoot through the air would fill whole newspapers. And here we are, apparently alone!"

"Alone with eighty million Japs somewhere in the vicinity. . . . As busy as ants, highly organized, efficient and obedient. How soon do you suppose their planes will be over us?"

"We are a small island. Perhaps we're not worth noticing," he replied.

"In Europe, the Germans considered anything worth noticing. And every little corner was worth conquering. They left no stone unturned."

"There might be a difference between Europe and the islands of the Pacific. The great bodies of water alone would make some difference. And what the Germans can accomplish on land the Japs could not do in the sea. Water calls for a different technique."

They climbed higher and higher. Now and then they paused to look at the magnificent scene below them.

"Do you still think this a very romantic place?" asked Penny with a malicious twinkle in her eye.

"Well, you discouraged me so, Penny, that I just had to put it out of my mind."

"And other things have happened since."

"Well, yes. And on the other hand, what happened only prompts me to make a deal with you."

"What kind of deal?"

"Well, here we are: We start out from San Francisco. You are going

on to the stories. Hell, what's a contract? War tears up more contracts than— I'll give you a contract."

"What kind of a contract?"

"You stick to me, and I'll stick to you. And I'll do my stuff and you'll do your stuff, and then whatever comes through we will divide as fairly and as squarely as we know how."

"Sounds O.K. to me."

"Then it's a go?"

"Since we've got to be together anyway, we might just as well, until we can get back or something."

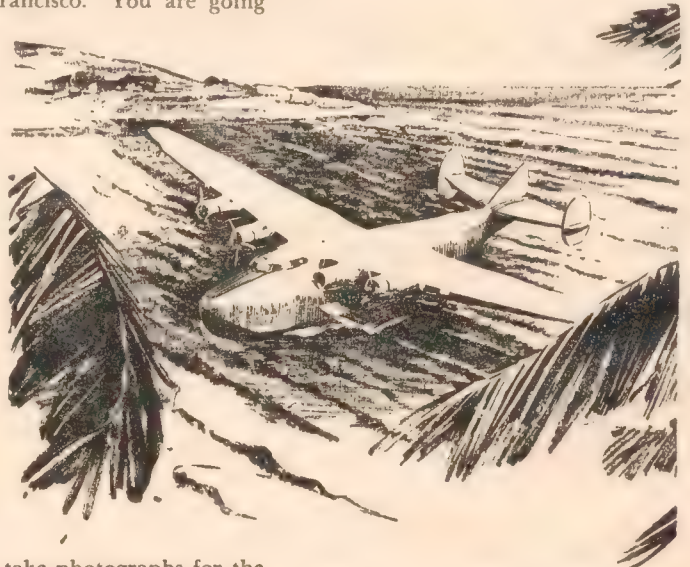
"And if it works out all right, we could continue it."

"Yes, if it works out. I promise to do my part."

"And I certainly will do mine," he added quickly.

"It's a deal. Signed and sealed."

"It's signed all right, but it's not sealed."



to China to take photographs for the picture magazines, and I am going to Burma to get the stories—whatever I can get. There is no brains in that. Here I've got news that needs pictures, and you've got to go to find news to photograph. Now, isn't that foolish?"

"Nothing foolish in it at all. The only foolish thing is that we both started out a day or two late. Here we are, and it's a hundred to one you don't get to Burma nor I to China."

"Where do we get?"

"I don't know."

"Well, that's my whole point. We should team up, and wherever we land, there is certain to be news to write that will need some pictures. I click the words on the typewriter, and you click the negatives."

"But I have a contract with the magazines."

"The magazines will use the stuff, and what they don't use we can tack

There was a brief moment of silence between them.

"All right," said Penny, breaking the silence. "Let's seal it."

He put his arm about her and kissed her.

"Gee," he said finally. "The moment I saw you get on that plane, I knew that destiny was on the job."

"And the moment I saw that curly head of yours," she added quickly, "I knew I had little chance."

All this time they had been climbing slowly. But now they walked hand in hand.

"We are not far from the top," said Penny. "When we get there, we will be able to see around the entire island."

Soon they reached the top of the crater, which was quite shallow, saucer-shaped, and perhaps only a hundred feet from rim to rim. A thin

grass grew sparingly on the inside, and this was a parched yellow from the semi-tropical sun. A little path seemed to run around the edge of the rim, which at one point was quite a bit higher. And at first they noticed nothing peculiar about the inside of the crater.

Suddenly Macdonald discovered that some of the grass had a whitish cast in places. He pointed his finger to it and said: "Looks like powdered chalk or something."

They could not make it out. But climbing to the high point and looking carefully across the hollow, they could discern a strange figure which had been written with powdered chalk on the thin grass. And as they looked



They could hear the roar of the engines warming up. "Come, Penny, hurry," said Macdonald.

*Illustrated by
Hamilton Greene*

closer, they were certain that this was some kind of mark or sign, for at one side there was a long line, and at the end of this long line they could see the head of an arrow, also drawn in powdered chalk. Being so close, it was hard to make it out.

Macdonald surveyed the ground with his eyes and said: "It looks to me like a marker placed here for a purpose."

"Can you make it out?"

"I can't make it out. But I know that it is Japanese."

It may have taken them twenty minutes or more to reach the top of the volcano. But they came down in quicker time.

When they were about halfway down, they could see Captain Clark standing on the wing of the clipper. They waved to him frantically. He waved back.

Then they yelled something, and he yelled back. But neither was able to make out what the other was saying.

But those at the Paradise Hotel had heard them and were waiting.

"Is there something up?" called Hastings.

"Yes!" replied Macdonald.

Once in the yard, Macdonald and Penny were ready to make their disclosure, but they had to pause for an instant. They were badly out of breath.

Finally Macdonald took a scrap of paper from his pocket. "Here it is!" he said. "It looked like this. But there is no one here, I am sure, who can read it. I have copied it as best I could. Must have been drawn with powdered chalk or plaster, which the damp sea air has hardened and made stick to the grass. It fills the whole inside, perhaps for a hundred feet. And the arrow seems to point in this direction."

The Chinese official took the paper from Macdonald's hand. "Ahl!" he said. "You have drawn it upside down. It should stand this way."

"But what does it mean?" several inquired.

"It is very simple. It is a character for the figure five."

"Can you read Japanese?" asked Mary.

"The Japanese use many Chinese characters. The spoken language is different, but many of the written characters are identical."

"Oh," said Mary, "I never knew that. But what would five indicate?"

"Merely a number," said the Russian. "A marker in the vast Pacific that would guide any plane toward a predetermined course. There are probably many islands that are numbered and therefore can be easily identified from the air."

"They seem to have everything planned," remarked Penny.

"It was the same in 1905," replied Malinka. "They attacked in Manchuria without warning. It's a Japanese principle, to make war first and declare it later." After a slight pause he recited the following with great emotion: "Japan is the first Nazi nation, even before the German Nazis. Of this I could tell you a great deal. . . . Japan is guilty of destroying the hope of the entire world. It was this hope that followed the last war and included a plan for peace. . . . Peace means simply one thing: that nations should live together as friends, not as animals. It was Japan who first destroyed this hope. And it was Japan who has shown the way to other Fascist nations. She has taught them to plunder weak countries. She has taught both Italy and Germany how to disregard the rights of weaker nations."

"Yes," agreed the Chinese diplomat.

The Russian, filled with rage, went on: "Japan thinks she can build an empire by trickery and falsehood. She has taught the other Fascists how to make war without declaring war. And she has destroyed the peace of the entire world for her own selfish gain. But it will not help her. She would like to push civilization back two thousand years, into a new kind of inquisition. An Asiatic inquisition. But it will not help." He held up a finger in warning and added in a quieter voice: "Remember there are still some decent people in the world. And China is not yet beaten. And now—now it is all very simple."

"How do you mean, simple?" asked Penny.

"Japan has the whole of America against her. In the old days an island was called a body of land surrounded by water. Japan is now a land surrounded by enemies."

"It is all very hard to believe," commented Mother Hastings. "And now one does not know what to do."

Just as she spoke these words the Doctor appeared with his suitcase and medical bag. He announced that he was ready.

"I too expected to spend the rest of my days on this peaceful little island," said Andrew Hastings, proprietor of the Paradise Hotel. "But I guess now the time has come for us to pack and go."

"You'd better be quick about it," said Penny.

IT took them little time to decide. Mother Hastings ran to her room to pack, while Andrew the proprietor called the house-boys and taking out what cash there was in the till, turned the keys over to them.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "I bought this place from a retired captain for twenty-five dollars. Run it as best you can. If we do not come back in two years, the place is yours. If we do come back, then we will square up everything. If the enemy wants it, give it to them. Good-by, and good luck." He slapped his house-boys on the back.

Someone was calling from a canoe which was paddling hard toward the shore. They looked out.

Clark came running up the beach. "Everybody aboard!" he shouted. "We are taking off!"

"Then they got the message?" asked the Russian.

"Yes. I think so. This came back on the same wave-length." He held a paper before him on which a series of numbers was written.

Malinka examined it carefully and spoke the words aloud in Russian. "It says," he translated: "Message received and being forwarded War Department. Stand by."

"That's what I thought," said Clark. "Let's get on board and get away from here before our location is discovered. If the message comes through, we can get it on the wing."

"The Doctor is coming with us," announced Penny.

"And I hope there is room for us two," quickly added Mother Hastings.

"There is room—only hurry!"

"We did not tell you of our discovery," said Macdonald. He told quickly of the figure marked boldly on the grass.

"We can't leave it there," said Penny. "How much time can you give us?"

"The grass is dry. We could burn it with almost a single match," cried Macdonald. "But I would not trust this task to the natives or anyone."

"Go to it, but hurry!" cried Clark. "And come right down to the beach."

Macdonald and Penny gathered up an old newspaper and with all possible speed climbed the path up the old volcano. When they were halfway up, they paused a second to catch their breath, and looking out, saw that the canoes had already left the shore for the clipper. And they could hear the roar of the engines warming up.

"Come, Penny, hurry," called Macdonald.

They climbed as hard as they could, and in a few minutes were at the top

rim of the crater. Here they discovered that the wind was against them and they had to run part way around the edge so that when the grass was set afire it would burn across the entire basin.

They lost no time lighting sheets of paper and throwing them over the rim as they ran. Soon the grass was burning and quickly spreading.

The task was done; and now, fully satisfied, they started down with all possible speed.

In another two minutes they were lying on their backs on the bottom of a canoe, panting hard.

"That's our first job," said Macdonald, taking Penny's hand.

"Yes," she replied, "our first."

SEVERAL hands reached down and helped them into the cabin of the clipper. The door was closed and bolted, and they were off.

As they rose from the water's edge, they caught a good view of the burning grass on the top of the dead volcano.

"Good-by, Little Jut," said Mother Hastings in a small plaintive voice. Her hand seemed to wave slightly.

The plane climbed to gain altitude and headed in a southerly direction. In less than twenty minutes the message in code was received.

Malinka took a pencil and quickly added seven to every cipher. Then he read aloud: "Return at once to San Francisco, fuel at Wake Island. Make all speed possible. Report any enemy ships sighted in same code."

They kept careful watch, and on the second day they did discover one enemy cargo-ship which they promptly reported. But that was all. Without any further adventure they arrived in the harbor of San Francisco.

There is little else to record of this quick turn-about in the middle of the Pacific on a certain day in December, except to say that Malinka is now in Washington in the Russian Embassy and has become great friends with the young Chinese diplomat.

Clark and Mary Loring were married the day after they landed. He is now a flying instructor for the United States Navy. The Doctor has the rank of a major in the United States Army.

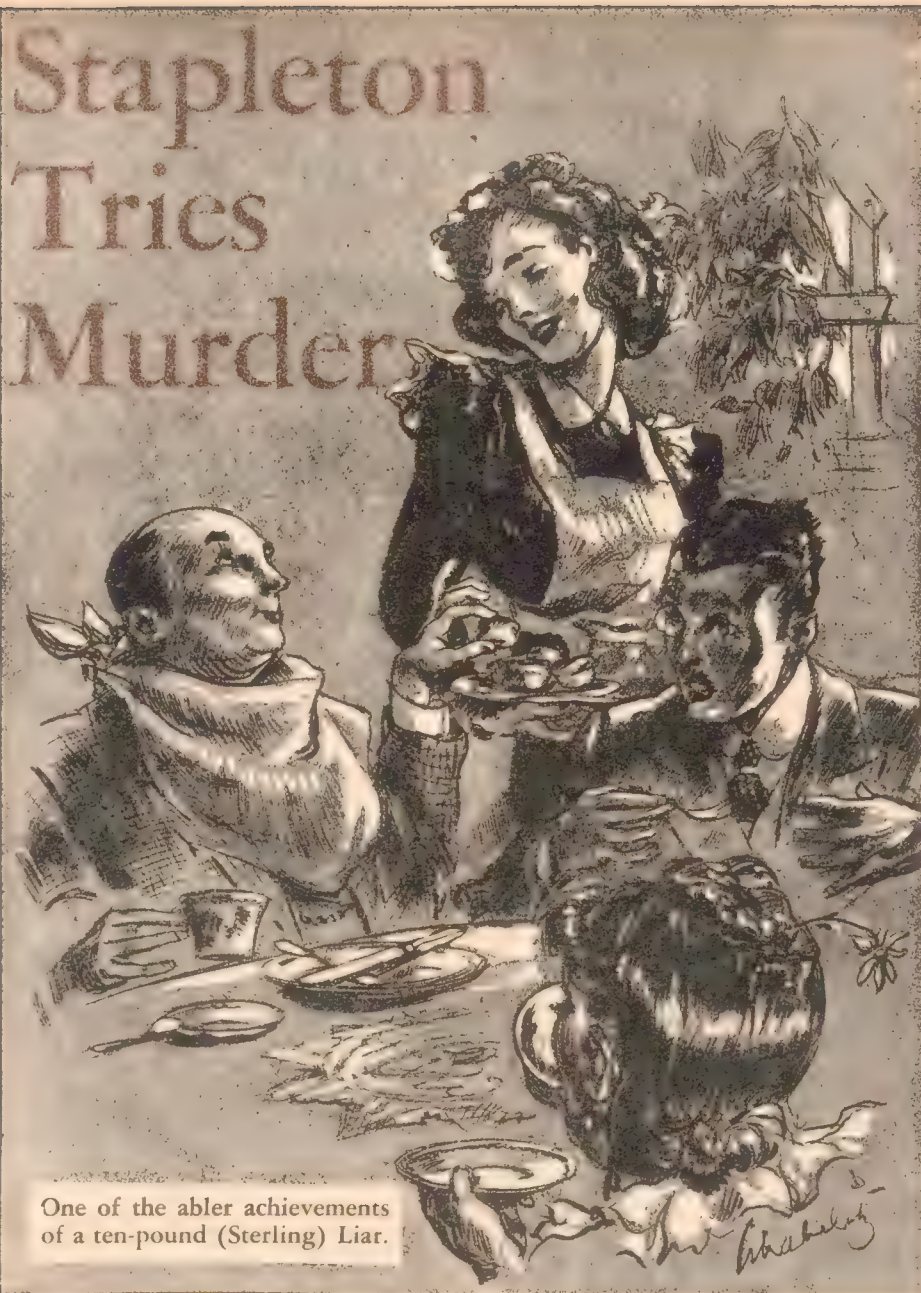
As for the Hastings, they are at present living on his brother's ranch in Lower California. They dream of going back to Little Jut some day when things are quiet. Recently they had a visit from Macdonald and Penny, who came to a near-by Army camp to get a story with pictures. Their partnership has proven a great success.

As they were leaving, Mother Hastings said to them: "As long as I live, I will always remember that day in December."



"It is not the drunkard in me talking. It is that other person."

Stapleton Tries Murder



One of the abler achievements
of a ten-pound (Sterling) Liar.

by Sutton Thompson

WHEN a chap needs ten pounds, he gets it. Perhaps he does a spot of ditch-digging, or he writes a story; or if he's a doctor Johnny, he mends a collar-bone; whatever it is, he gets it. He works for it, and first you know, there he is with the ready.

My friend Archer Stapleton (not his real name: he'd nick me another ten if I used that!) always needs ten pounds, never works for it, but always gets it. He is the green bay tree; he

toils not, neither does he spin, unless you count stories. He spins stories as a spider spins a web. One is never sure they are absolutely false; one is never sure of anything about them except this one thing: at the end of them, he always puts the bite on you for ten quid.

Stapleton has been doing this as long as I have known him. I went to school with him; and all his life he has been absolutely the worst sort of swindler you can imagine; even if all

his stories are true, that is probably the worst swindle of them all.

For some years Stapleton was absent from England, out rummaging the Colonies. Up to a year or so ago when the war started, he used to absent himself mysteriously on these far-flung jaunts, and from them he returned, from time to time, gaunt, impeccably tailored as ever, and with a story. That story cost you ten pounds.

That is Stapleton's figure. He never asks for less, and he never asks for

more; and if he once starts telling you the tale, you are always bound to part with it. Some of us at the club have deliberately exposed ourselves to him, shuffling everything in advance so as to be sure not to fall for him. But the wretched fellow always conquers. You either pity him at the end, or get excited unwisely, as did I with the Rose Pearl of the Celebes; or you are afraid for him, as in the case of Berkeley and the Seven Hairy Brothers; or you are afraid he is actually telling the truth and want to save the felon from jail, as I did, in what I like to think of as the Suburban Murder and the Lobelias.

At the club we dodge Stapleton; he is almost a sweepstakes. Jergens Minor legged it trippingly all the way to Trafalgar Square one night in seventeen seconds flat, and won the twenty-pound purse we got up for the best fugitive from Stapleton—only of course Stapleton later persuaded him to give him back ten of it on the grounds he could have caught him if he had been really pressing. There is always something horribly plausible about Stapleton. If you can dodge him, it saves you a tenner. The leg I spent at Dunkirk gives him rather an edge on me; and now that the air raids have made most of the other chaps uncommon spry, he considers me his pigeon. In the old days it used to be Major Brett, for he packed around fifteen stone acquired in Burma and wasn't nimble at all, but now Brett is down to twelve stone, and outruns me on my crutches easily.

So this night when I heard that great booming voice of Stapleton's at the outer doors, I wasted no time.

"You're on duty, Brett?" I said quietly; we have an air-raid spotting-place on what's left of the roof.

"I go on,"—Brett consulted his watch,—"at precisely one ack emma. Three minutes sharp." He rose.

"Oh," I said offhand-like. "Tell you what: I've a bit of a headache, and the fresh air'll probably do some good. I'll take your turn, eh?"

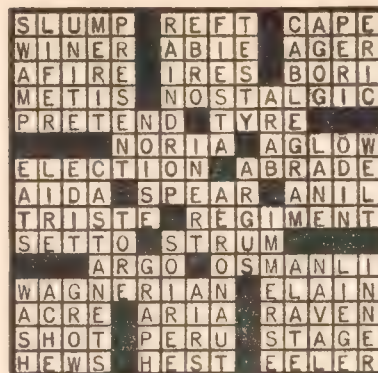
"Leg bothering you?" said Brett. The leg I whiffed off somewhere on Dunkirk beach is an amazing thing. It comes back with corns and varicose veins and amazing things, although of course it's not there at all, and all the fellows know about it.

"Yes," said I, pampering a wince. "Bit of a touch, I guess."

I held my breath. I could hear Stapleton booming closer. In a moment he would be in the club room.

"In that case all right, of course," Brett said. I let my breath go. I was in ten pounds. Poor Brett! Still, one has to fight for oneself in this world. An instant later I was crutching busily up over the club roof, my respirator case, tin hat and field-glasses

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 95



flying from me like the devil's coat-tails. I sat down in the Bath chair sort of arrangement that lets you be fairly comfortable on vigil and at the same time keeps your eyes constantly on the sky for Jerry. I drew a long breath of relief. Minutes ticked off safely. London was cool. I hedged my coat about me. I had just begun to wish I had grabbed a blanket, when I heard a step crunching across the roof gravel.

"I have brought you something warm," said a voice.

It was Stapleton!

"There is a war on," I reminded him again; "and if you do not mind, I should like to be left alone to serve my part in it—according," I said pointedly, "to the regulations."

"Must be lonely up here all night."

"I serve only four hours. I am never lonely, Stapleton, without you."

"It reminds me of that night in the Celebes; there was a great pearl we were after, a rose-colored monster of a pearl—"

"You have told me about the pearl of the Celebes."

"And a tidy penny you must have made out of it."

HE said this enthusiastically, as if he were glad of my good fortune; cheerfully, as though, even if he were the loser in selling me the priceless thing, he was glad to see me get ahead.

"The man said that pearl, that wonderful pearl of yours, was a hollow sham worth at the outside five quid. You swindled me there, my bucko. I could have you arrested for that, I suppose," I said pensively.

"I was very nearly arrested once," Stapleton said cheerfully. "In fact, I am rather lucky to be here talking to you. And yet, as you would unquestionably agree, my Aunt Jennifer—well, no sweeter package ever lived. My Aunt Jennifer—"

"I do not give a damn about your Aunt Jennifer. I am on air-raid duty,

I wish to be left alone. You are going to tell me something that happened in Nova Zembla when you were thirteen, and it will be a pack of lies. You have no Aunt Jennifer whatsoever. And you have never been to Nova Zembla, and I will under no circumstances lend you ten pounds."

"Not Nova Zembla," Stapleton said. "It was Kingsbridge."

"You will not get a pound off me," I said presently. "And before you open your mouth, I feel obliged to warn you that your presence here is in defiance of a wartime regulation."

He is a tall, handsome chap, with a great deal of red hair, and he towered above me as, paying no attention, he tucked around my knees the robe he had brought.

"I just brought this to keep you warm," he repeated.

"Well, you can just get to hell out of here, now, and leave me to my duty," I said firmly.

I kept staring heavenward, hoping he'd go away. Fellows do come up and have a chat with you when you're on duty, now and then. But there is a rule against it.

Stapleton made no move to leave. He took a deep breath of London air, which at this juncture was compounded about equally of a backfired Thames fishery, a wisp of sulphurous fog, and the aroma of tar roof.

"Wonderful!" he cried, sucking the stuff in. This passes for patriotism with Stapleton. It shows that he loves London. This is as far as he goes, and as far as he goes it is the end of the line.

"Kingsbridge," said Stapleton, "murder in Kingsbridge. I am going down there tomorrow to the cemetery."

"Go away, Stapleton," I said tiredly.

"Not Nova Zembla. Not the Irrawaddy. Not Bulawayo, nor Mozambique, Ceylon, Trieste, Bodreaux. Simple, humdrum, rural English Kingsbridge—and the greatest adventure of my life."

"Pity you weren't killed," I said. "I have never been closer to death in my entire life."

I would not take my eyes off the night skies, but I began to pound with my crutch on the roof with all my might. I picked up the phone. Jergens answered promptly.

"Mr. Stapleton is up here in direct violation of wartime regulations," I said distinctly. "You will please have him removed at once."

I hung up the phone.

"You never met my Uncle Fred, did you?" Stapleton continued humorously. He crossed to the telephone. He lifted the receiver.

"Ah, Jergens? When you come up, bring us a couple of Scotch and splashes."

He hung up the phone. As he tumbled past me, he said it was his treat. I shut my lips very tightly. He has never paid for a drink in his life. "Murder," he repeated softly. "It's like jade, isn't it? Like those fine pocket pieces the Chinese fondle in their fingers as a woman sniffs perfume. It's bizarre, *outré*, if you like. It's as exotic as my Uncle Fred was mild, the Kingsbridge opposite."

OUT of the corner of my eye I could make out Stapleton in the dusk. He was shooting his cuffs. I know his every movement: I could see in my mind's eye his great knobbly wrists flexing as he got into the swing of the thing.

Before he could continue, the steward, Jergens, pushed through the gloom with the drinks. He must have looked timorously at Stapleton, for a moment later I could hear the tall idiot's booming laugh. Jergens put the drinks down. He has been with the club a long time: without hesitation he gave the chit to me. I signed it. He moved thankfully off again.

"Ah," said Stapleton, with a fine show of absentness, "you paying for the first round? Very well, then."

"Drink your drink," said I, "and get out of here and go swindle some homeless folk. London is full of them. I don't know why you're wasting your time."

"Kingsbridge!" said Stapleton quietly. He was pacing up and down now, like some great cat in faultless Bond Street clothes. I could see him chewing the frazzled ends of his gingery mustache for the last drops of his whisky and soda. I paid him no attention. I kept my eyes on the sky.

"The last time I was in Kingsbridge I had gone down to see Uncle Fred about a matter of some moment. A stroke of business I was able to put him in the way of—"

"Which in the end netted you ten quid and left him holding the bag," I said sympathetically.

"Not bad, not bad at all," said Stapleton with the air of one praising a backward child.

"He was by no means the sort of Johnny you'd think of in connection with murder. His face was round-moonish, sort of. A chap I met in Petrograd once had just that sort of a face, and diddled me out of my share of the Glatzenoff Emerald. Reynolds, the name was; his mother was a Turk, by God, though I must say I didn't know of this till later. And his father—his father, would you believe it—"

"You have told me about what you candidly refer to as the Glatzenoff Emerald," I said acidly. I snapped on my pocket lighter and consulted a small black book. "You told it me on May 23, 1939."

"Be careful with that lighter, old boy," Stapleton reproved gravely. He continued unabashed: "His father was a natural son of the Dalmatian ambassador! Uncle Fred looked exactly like him. He looked like any French, English, Russian, American, Siberian business man who has got a good hold on six hundred quid a year and intends to keep it. He had a thriving, smug hardware business; he bought, I should say, one suit every three years; he was a vestryman and read the lesson every Sunday. I understand he had given up checkers quite early; he told me once it was merely a first cousin of outright gambling."

"Did you get your ten pounds off him with your—ah—business proposition?" I inquired insultingly.

"Wonderful idea, that," Stapleton said respectfully. "Thought it up myself. Edible beer-bottles."

I blinked. There was a short silence.

"Edible beer-bottles," Stapleton repeated firmly. "Bottles baked of pretzel-dough. To be filled up with beer. Drink a little beer, eat a little of the bottle down to where you've drunk. Eat and drink, all in one! No disposal problem! No broken glass littering the highway! Make 'em in all flavors, peppermint pretzel for the ladies—anything you like. Edible, mind you! Edible beer-bottles! A real bonanza," he said calculatingly, "for a chap with a little cash and foresight."

He was off, now. There was no stopping him. . . .

I went down to see Uncle Fred about it (he said). I arrived early in the morning. He was shaving. I sat on the edge of the tub and watched him. Kingsbridge is such a dull hole, I wanted to get my business over and catch the afternoon train, if possible. While he shaved, I began to outline my proposition. Neither of us heard Aunt Jennifer open the bathroom door. She said breakfast was ready. The sound of her voice startled him.

"There is a war on," I reminded him; "and if you do not mind, I like to be left alone."

He jumped. This mild, buttery man! I looked at him keenly. "Ah," said I to myself. "Nerves, is it?"

"I'll be right down, my love," said he. She stood there. He began to dab at his cheek with a bit of cotton. "See what you've made me do?" Aunt Jennifer looked. His razor had made a small cut. Aunt Jennifer looked again, then dashed if she didn't nearly keel over. Her face became pale as death. The sight of blood knocked her absolutely endways. Rummy sight, you know! A great strapping woman like Aunt Jennifer trembling like a queasy schoolgirl.

He paid absolutely no attention to her. She sighed. She wandered off downstairs. Uncle Fred took his immemorial time completing the ritual of his toilet. When she left, he didn't say a word. One could see that he was exercising self-control, and that his ability to put up with poor Aunt Jennifer was a continual source of amazement to him. He would have liked to say: "Why the hell don't you knock on the door!" Probably if it weren't for the hardware business and the lesson-reading and the rest of it, he'd have clouted her one.

I SAT there on the edge of the tub, just feeling it oozing out of him, a damned eerie sensation, like in a poker-game when you're sitting there with two pair and this easy-going deacon-faced fellow across the table—by Jove, you just know he's got three jacks. You couldn't tell what Uncle Fred was thinking by looking at his Bible-belt face, but you could feel it just as plain as those three jacks.



Something was up. Whatever it was, it boded Aunt Jennifer no good. I loved her very dearly. I resolved to do something about it directly I had got my business settled, for I was more than a match for this mewling, murderous, porridgy-looking pipsqueak standing there with his augers and shovels and hardware. . . .

Stapleton stretched himself like the chaps in the health ads. He is extraordinarily fit, though heaven knows how he keeps in shape these later days.

"I like," said Stapleton, "to lay matters right on the cloth; and besides, I wanted breakfast."

"Uncle," I said to him, "how about this edible beer-bottle dodge?"

He turned his pudgy, round, blank face at me.

"I can't," said he.

"Can't?" said I.

"Insurance, you know," he said.

LOOKING back now, I can see he wanted a witness. At the time, all I could think of was that Uncle Fred was getting awfully intimate. Used to be awfully grudging about giving you the time of day.

"Insurance?" said I. "Look, Uncle Fred! Insurance—"

He pointed his razor at me. Even now I get panicky, thinking about it.

"Great thing, young fellow. Great thing, insurance! Just took out a big packet on myself." He stropped a few strokes. "Matter of fact, just took out a packet on your Aunt Jennifer."

Nine fellows out of ten would have thought to themselves: "Decent old bagger! I mean, after all!" Not me. From beginning to end I wouldn't have trusted him with a red-hot stove. "Stapleton," said I to myself, "there's a chap about to do a bunk." I could feel it.

I talked to him awhile longer, but it was no use. He agreed cautiously that I probably had a million dollars just waiting the sowing of a few pounds, but there was the insurance, and by the time he'd got that far, he was finished dressing and we were on our way downstairs.

I lagged behind him a moment. I knew it was no go. "You shall be warned, Aunt Jennifer," I said to myself. But I never had a chance. We joined her. She was already at breakfast.

"Hello, Archer," she said to me. "I've got you a bloater." She had, sure enough. I mean, that's a bit of a thing, remembering I liked them. Aunt Jennifer and I have always seen eye to eye where it counts.

I said the usual. I sat down and began breakfast. Uncle Fred pecked at her cheek. I could have kissed the bloater with more feeling. But in a few moments we were all putting on the old crunch, and I always say do

one thing at a time and do it well. Aunt Jennifer is an admirable housekeeper. Even the maid, Elsie, was lovely. Pretty girl, North country, red-cheeked, hips, ankles, waist, and—ah—lovely!

Uncle Fred thought so too.

I saw him looking at her once, covertly. I remembered the insurance.

"Stapleton," I broke in, "as a detective you nauseate me."

"Well!" said Stapleton, pleased.

"Do I, now! Well, well."

"Set a thief—" I said acidly.

"I've always said that," Stapleton concurred warmly. "Did I ever tell you about the Scarlet Laughing Men of Madagascar? I was stationed off Lourenço Marques, 1927 I think, and one night—"

"You told that to Geoff Haldane," I said insultingly. "He loaned you ten pounds on the strength of it."

"Good old Haldane!" Stapleton mused. "I'll never forget the time I got you and him out of that scrape with the Proctor's daughter—"

"Your Aunt Jennifer!" I said indignantly.

"Aunt Jennifer," Stapleton echoed sadly. He sighed. . . .

My Aunt Jennifer was kind, indulgent, live-and-let-live to a fault. As we sat at breakfast that morning I couldn't help but glance furtively from time to time at this maid, Elsie. It seemed to me that when she served Uncle Fred, he took pains to keep her there as long as he could, although of course that may all have been my imagination. I knew what he was up to, you see, and directly I'd made up my mind, I wanted a motive.

"You're looking at your Uncle Frederick very peculiarly, Archer," Aunt Jen said suddenly. I fancy I jumped. But he just smiled his little treacherous smile that was always about the corner of his thin pink mouth, and went on with his eggs.

"Were you staring at me, Archer?" said he mildly.

"I was thinking of insurance," said I meaningly. I stared hard at him. "Have you read about the Scottish insurance murder? Yesterday's paper, I believe."

He never turned a hair.

"Still reading those frightful penny dreadfuls," said Aunt Jen. She turned to Uncle Fred. "Archer has been reading the cheapest newspaper in London ever since I can remember."

"What paper is that?" This was a new voice from just behind me. I was a little edgy. I jumped. It was a little stout man, Dickens size, as obviously a vicar as Kingsbridge could offer.

Uncle Fred became hearty, directly. I forgot to mention, I believe, that we were breakfasting out of doors, on the flagstoned terrace, a pleasant, flowery

place, thanks to Aunt Jennifer's gardening. Aunt Jennifer had a green thumb. I believe she won every prize Lesser Kingswold had had to offer at their annual village carnival, and for weeks after the ladies of Kingsbridge found it difficult to speak to her. The vicar at once fell to examining the flowers.

"Do you know?" he said, looking up from a grubby blue plant, "I believe you are in league with the devil, Jennifer. These are the finest lobelias in the Kingdom. How do you raise them in June?"

Aunt Jennifer flushed and bridled a bit, as women do when they're pleased about some trifle. Uncle Fred's face was expressionless.

"You think those are nice?" he asked. "You should see some others she keeps to herself."

"He doesn't like it," said Aunt Jennifer, "because I keep my special ones upstairs." She turned to Uncle Fred fondly. "You're an awful silly, you know."

"Keeps them in the bedroom," said Uncle Fred.

"Really?" said the vicar.

"You shall have a cutting!" Aunt Jennifer vowed. "I'll get you one at once."

She pelted off upstairs; anyone could get to her heart at once if he praised her flowers.

Uncle Fred shrugged humorously when she had gone.

"Imagine! In the bedroom!" said he. One could see this must have rankled in him for months. "Over and over again," Uncle Fred was saying with a smile, "I have told her to be careful—"

AT that instant, from overhead, came Aunt Jennifer's voice. We looked up. She was leaning out of the second story window of their bedroom. The sill was extremely low. Nailed to it on the outside of the house was a window-box, blooming over with huge lobelias. The box was a trifle lower than the sill. She had to lean far out. My stomach suddenly felt very empty. I looked away from Aunt Jennifer. I looked down at the terrace. It was flagstoned, hard, pitiless, skull-crushing flagstone. I looked up at Aunt Jennifer again. A good half of her stout body was out of the window, leaning down. I shuddered. Everything was frightfully plain, like a thunderclap.

"Again and again I've warned her," I could hear Uncle Fred saying quietly, "about those floors, those slippery floors—"

The vicar shook his head worriedly, staring up.

"Careful!" he called out.

"Down in a jiff!" caroled Aunt Jennifer. She teetered there a moment in

a fashion to make one's blood cold. Then she seized a big lobelia from a clump farthest from her reach, tugged, brought it up roots and all, and disappeared back into the bedroom.

MY shoulders slumped. I confess I wiped my forehead.

"You're behaving rather strangely, Archer," Uncle Fred said. "Shall I get you something?"

"Long train trip," I mumbled.

"I'll get you something," Uncle Fred said. He ambled off into the house.

"These Kingsbridge Junes," the vicar said sympathetically. "I imagine, though, you've seen a bit of queer weather in your time, from what your Uncle tells me."

I recollected suddenly I had spent quite a bit of money on a trip that thus far had netted me a doughnut-shaped bit of fog. Most of these down-country vicars are well-heeled, as a rule, younger sons and what not. I began rapidly to tell him about the ruby prayer-wheel of Baluchistan, but he was an unreceptive son of the church. I got nowhere; and to tell the truth, I was actually glad to see Uncle Fred returning with a salver and glasses. His idea of "something" turned out to be a sort of pokeberry wine, highly esteemed by the natives in those parts, and tasting, to be charitable, like a swift dash through a cannery.

"That slightly fishy taste you may have discovered,"—the vicar beamed benevolently,—*"is the truly healthful part of the wine."*

"The beauty of it," chimed in Uncle Fred, *"is that it's so absolutely non-alcoholic."*

"He'll give it to you every day," comforted Aunt Jennifer, coming out about that time with the lobelia, which by this time had been carefully potted.

"I wish he could," I said heartily. "Matter of fact, though, I've got to get back to the city." I looked at my watch.

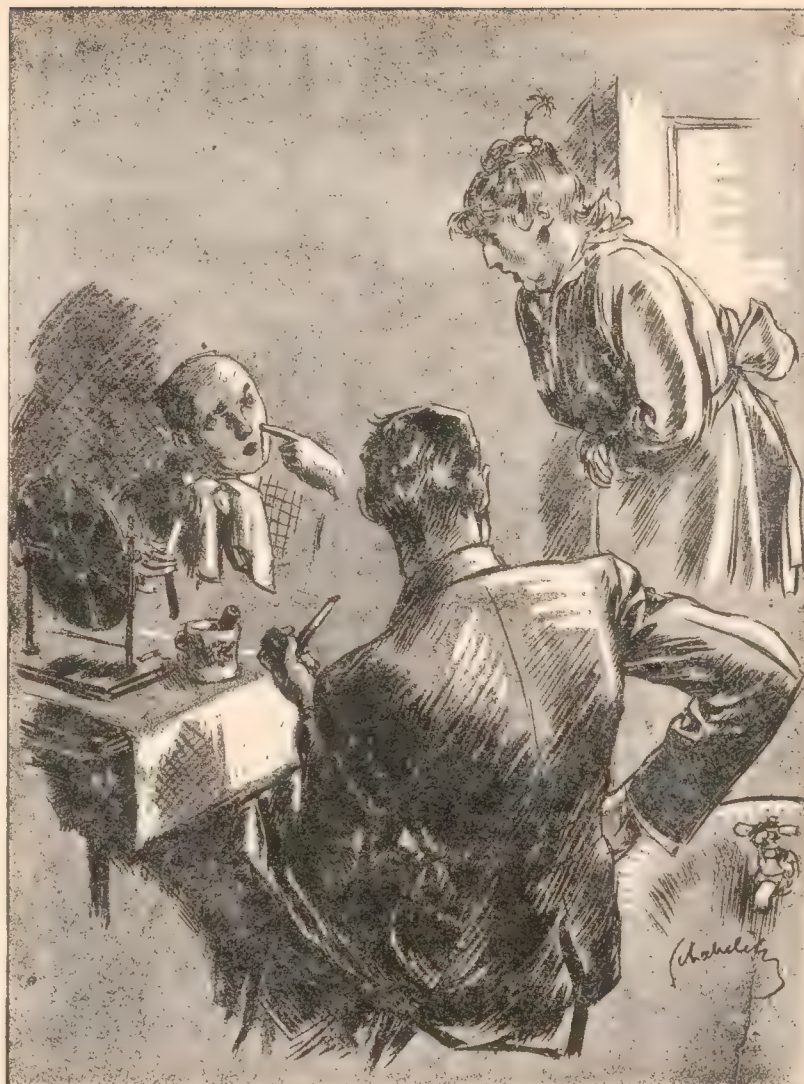
"But you've just come down!" protested Aunt Jennifer.

"I'd promised myself at least a few evenings with you at crokinole!" mumbled Uncle Fred.

"Surely you're not going to miss the ladies' archery butts, Kingsbridge versus Lower Worpleton, day after tomorrow? Folk," said the vicar hopefully, "come down all the way from Surrey to see them sometimes. I remember one year—"

I passed my hand over my brow.

"I'd promised myself a week," I said dejectedly. "This confounded memory of mine! Must be in Harley Street tomorrow evening. Periodic check-up, you know." I patted my head delicately. "That old wound.



"See what you've made me do?" said Uncle Fred. Aunt Jennifer was trembling like a schoolgirl.

Shan States uprising. Gives me a little trouble now and again."

"Imagine!" breathed the vicar.

"Ohhhh!" gasped Aunt Jennifer, and came over to stand beside me.

"Bad business!" said Uncle Fred. "You would travel about so, you know."

"Well," I shrugged, "there we are, of course."

"You've missed the Express," said the vicar. "I believe there's a milk-train leaves Kingsbridge about five-thirty in the morning."

"Poor old Archer!" said Aunt Jennifer. I put my arm around her. I looked her right in the eye. "I'll be back before the end of the fortnight," I said quietly. I tipped her a wink. I put everything I had into it. I wasn't worried about what might happen in the next few days. Uncle Fred

knew that I sensed something was funny; I'd seen to that, with my sly allusions. . . .

"You were mighty quick to run away," I said suspiciously. "It seems to me you might at least have stayed long enough to warn your Aunt—" I stopped talking in mid-sentence. High in the heavens overhead, it seemed to me there was a dim streak of orange light. I strained my ears, listening for a tell-tale engine drone. When the light did not go away, I knew it was not a falling star. I kept my eyes on it and reached for the telephone. Stapleton had it off the hook and pressed it silently into my groping hand. I checked in. "Orange flash, directly overhead, about twenty-five thousand feet, over, over." They checked me out. The orange light faded and disappeared as Stapleton



Illustrated by R. F. Schabelitz

took the receiver from my hand and put it back in its cradle. Dornier, probably. Fairly high, though.

"No," said Stapleton quietly. "I thought I knew my man. I found out later I'd underestimated him. But when Uncle Fred said non-alcoholic, referring to the pokeberry wine, I immediately thought of poor, teetotalling George Bulmer. If ever a man had a few thousand for a flyer in edible beer-bottles, that man was George Bulmer; and remembering Bulmer, I knew this was the time of year he went up to Scotland, and if I wanted to catch him there wasn't a moment to lose."

He shook his handsome head wearily. "Uncle Fred had no business

sense. Absolutely none. I knew my man the minute he turned me down. I knew about the insurance from his own lips. I knew what he had in mind. As he left the bathroom, I had dallied behind a moment. Something had caught my eye. It was a copy of the *Blade*, that penny dreadful I always read. I snatched it up from behind the bathtub. It was open to the exact page of the insurance murder I popped at him in the garden during breakfast. I had his number, and he knew it. As I told you, for the next few days—and what might happen during those next few days—I wasn't worried. Next morning I got up early; it was still dark, fairly foggy, and no one was abroad

as I left the house to catch my train. In a few minutes I was in the market square.

I don't know whether you've seen a Devonshire townlet market square. It's the center of the community's prosaic life, an emerald oblong of innocence about the size of a half-acre, where at this early hour ducks and dogs and even an occasional cow foraged happily around the inevitable and incongruous war memorial, in this instance a disheveled German howitzer, its pigeon-stained snout pointing sternly at heaven. At the far end of the square the little Gothic church squatted fatly; and lining each side of the green were the shops, the fishmonger's, the grocer's, the baker's, Uncle Fred's hardware store, and of course the undertaker's. I hurried past this latter establishment with its two potted aspidistras in the window and its single coffin decorously on display. I reached the station. I got into the train. Some hours later I was in London. . . .

"You're padding this one a bit, aren't you, old boy?" I said, turning from my vigil a moment to look Stapleton in the eye. "I mean all this stuff about ducks and dogs and village greens—"

"I'm a sentimentalist," said Stapleton gravely. "And besides, it reminds me of poor old Aunt Jennifer."

There was a nameless something about that dark village as I left it, my last sight the funeral parlor, my last vivid memory the expression in Uncle Fred's pale eyes as he watched Aunt Jennifer leaning perilously out that low-silled window.

I tried for three days to run down George Bulmer. I had intended waiting a week. Then I was going down to Kingsbridge, put the right word convincingly in Aunt Jennifer's ear, kidnap her if necessary. But at the end of three days I knew I could wait no longer. I was restless. I became harried. At last I boarded the train for Kingsbridge.

THE slow cars bumped and clattered interminably over the rails. It seemed we would never get there. I stared out the window. I remembered the murder back of Uncle Fred's expressionless pupils. I could see him, coming home evening after evening, setting up a blameless pattern of living, thinking, thinking, thinking about the day for which he must have schemed and planned nearly three years—the day this boresome little man would soar away from the chrysalis of Kingsbridge to spread wings of freedom in some foreign land.

I could see his greedy, pudgy hands closing over the insurance money. I could visualize the coroner's report: "It is indeed sad that such an ideal

couple, so well suited to each other in life, should be separated by such a tragic accident. Mr. Peters has our deepest sympathy in his bereavement."

It was all so very simple. That was the beauty of it. Long before we reached Kingsbridge, my hands were icy with my own sweat. The window-sill was notoriously low; Aunt Jennifer was forever pottering about the window-boxes; the whole village must at one time or another have seen her leaning out perilously over the flag-stones below, and must have commented on it. They were known for a devoted couple. He would simply slip up behind her one day; she would turn her head; he would give her a single push. The unyielding stone would receive her; her brains would be dashed out; in an instant all would be over and done.

I fairly ran from the train when at long last it stopped at Kingsbridge station. It was late in the day, getting toward evening. My heart was pounding, I looked wildly about me for a trap or a taxi. I heard a vehicle outside the station. I ran out into the roadway. My heart stopped. Coming toward me was the undertaker's hearse, that dull rectangle of eternity drawn by its four black horses, their funeral plumes nodding as they plodded slowly off into the gathering dusk.

STAPLETON ceased speaking. "You were too late!" I blurted.

He nodded sadly.

"Too late," he assented grimly.

"Too, too late!"

"What did you do?"

He shrugged.

"It's not all you think," he said quietly. "I went on to the house." He shook his head. "Uncle Fred was so clever," he sneered. "For the world's prize bore, he thought himself such a clever man!"

"You notified the police, of course!" I said sharply.

"Police! There was no need for police! In an hour I had reconstructed the entire thing. The day after I left, Uncle Fred got the wind up. He decided it was now or never. He went slowly up to Aunt Jennifer's bedroom in the morning, when he knew she'd be pottering about the lobelias. He was careful to knock. They chatted a bit. He turned to go. At the door he said idly: 'And how are the lobelias, my dear?' He glanced at the window.

"I haven't looked at them today," Aunt Jennifer answered. 'See if they need watering, Fred.'

"He went over to the window-boxes, leaned out and felt the earth with the tips of his fingers. There was a slight noise behind him, and he turned his head. But she was too quick for him."

We sat there in the London darkness for a long time without speaking.

"So she turned the tables on him," I said at last. It was a weak thing to say, but I could say no more.

"He was a bore," said Stapleton. "I think in all the United Kingdom there was no greater bore than my late Uncle Fred. Aunt Jennifer must have reached the end of her endurance."

I HEARD a noise at one end of the roof, and then footsteps crunching over the gravel. Enderby Minor had come up to relieve me. My vigil was over. I crunched downstairs, Stapleton behind me. We lined up against the bar.

"So she turned the tables on him," I said, musingly. I could still say no more. And then suddenly something hit me. "Why," I said, "you—you are an accessory. You have guilty knowledge. In the eyes of the law, you've as good as committed murder yourself. By not turning in your Aunt Jennifer, you're as guilty as she!"

I believe I backed away as far as my crutches would permit.

"All that I have told you happened more than two years ago," Stapleton said quietly. His horsey face showed no surprise, no fear, only a patient sort of sadness. He closed his eyes. He opened them slowly. He moved his right arm almost imperceptibly.

Now that we had come into the light, I noticed for the first time that his sleeve was girdled by a band of black crepe.

I looked up swiftly at his face.

"Aunt Jennifer?"

"Yes," he said sadly. "The only witness against me is gone, now. Dear,

darling, poor Aunt Jennifer died just yesterday."

He took out his pocket handkerchief and blew his nose vigorously.

"Poor chap!" I said commiseratingly.

"I was wondering," said Stapleton, "if you could let me have a pound or so."

I reached for my wallet.

"Say six pounds ten, for railroad fare—just till next week, of course—and say three pounds ten, for flowers."

I calculated. I felt a slight chill.

"That comes to precisely ten pounds!" I said slowly.

I looked at Stapleton severely. I was just beginning to come out from the anesthetic. A tenner! The sum rang like a warning bell. He returned my look guilelessly. Stapleton is the world's smoothest operator. Still—one can never be sure. Reluctantly, I handed over the ten pounds.

"She was always so fond of flowers," Stapleton said humbly. "She'll know they're on her grave. I'm sure she will."

He sniffed, piously.

A sudden horrid thought struck me.

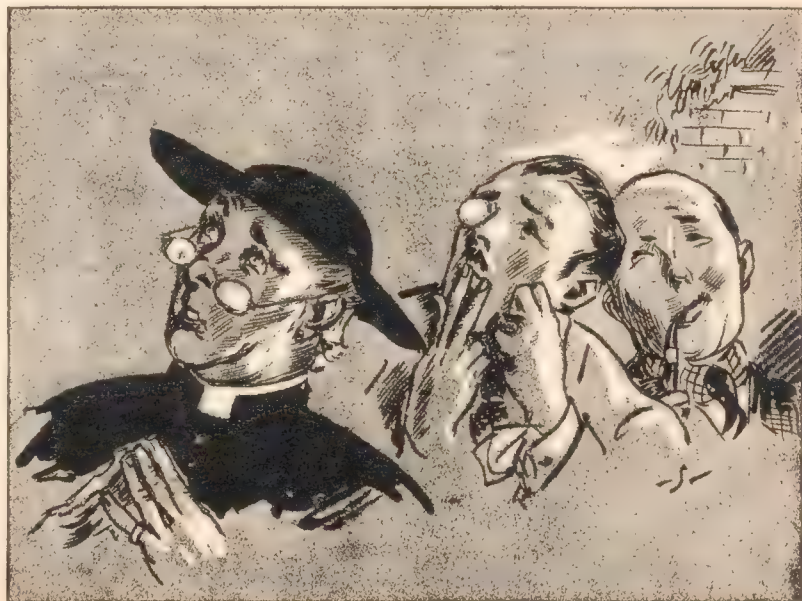
"Just a minute!" I said sharply. I reached for the money. "Six pounds ten, for railroad fare?" I cried triumphantly. "Six pounds ten, to Kingsbridge?"

Stapleton recoiled. He drew himself up to his full six feet-two. Then he smiled at me tolerantly. He shrugged.

"You didn't expect me to travel third class, did you—to a funeral?"

He pocketed the notes. He was gone.

I shall catch him at a loss, some day.



"Again and again I've warned her," I could hear Uncle Fred saying quietly.



*Kerner caught her shoulders: "Don't look at that. He's dead."
"Oh, Charles! Thank God! I thought they—they—"*

FRANCE *in their* HEARTS

A novel of North Africa in 1943—complete in this issue.

by *Georges Surdez*

THE German attack had come out of the Tunisian hills like lightning from a clear sky—bombing planes, armored vehicles, cannon, light and heavy mortars. Before Lieutenant Kerner could reach the lone antitank gun assigned to his section, it had been knocked out of existence, its crew mangled, killed or put to flight. The farm buildings were on fire, and the first combat groups of the enemy's infantry, alighting from trucks halted down the road, were strolling over the fields.

"No need to plant mines; all will be quiet until morning!" Sub-lieutenant Granier called out mockingly. Not thirty minutes before, Kerner had received that reassuring message from battalion headquarters, when he had sent word that he considered the position assigned to his unit too exposed, and asked for mines and material to prepare a defense.

He joined his second lieutenant beyond the sheltering angle of a building that was still intact; he found ten or twelve bewildered soldiers huddled there. They looked at him for orders, and he motioned with one hand, as much as to say: "All right, it's over; beat it!"—but he could not bring himself to utter the words.

Machine-guns and automatic rifles were tap-tapping streams of bullets back and forth. Kerner was furious. His men had been dumped here from trucks late in the afternoon, and he had been told that there was another battalion of North African infantry between him and the enemy. He had had but sixty-four men, and that until ten minutes ago. How many were left now? Lacking mines, and with the 47-gun gone, how was he expected to check armored stuff? With rifles and grenades?

He took an automatic rifle from a private, went around the corner into the open. The situation was not cheerful. Dust and smoke still drifted over what had been the gun emplacement; the outpost by the road was gone. He could see the bodies of three of the five men he had posted there. There was traffic on the road, and the Germans on foot, while still beyond good range, were coming on steadily.

"Well, this is what you were praying for," Granier told him.

"Shut up," Kerner said; then he addressed the *tirailleurs*: "Get back as best you can to the battalion, in the village back there. Nothing for you to do here."

"*Alors*," said a lanky, leathery Moorish sergeant. "The French always scam?" He was an old-timer, and wore bronze crosses—one of them won in Morocco ten or twelve years before, another fighting the Germans on the Somme in 1940. "I stay and load for you, Lieutenant."

"Get out of it, Granier!" Kerner propped the bipod support solidly, and flattened on the ground behind the weapon. He was not clear as to what he could do, but he

wanted to fire. The German infantrymen did not wear the gray uniforms he remembered; only a few wore helmets; but he recognized them by the precision with which they deployed when his first bursts struck near. They did not try to return his fire, knowing that the range was too long for firing on the move. But they had support.

From somewhere behind them spurted a series of rapid flashes, pale in the fading light. Small shells rained near by, bursting against the ground, against the wall. The sixth or seventh came close enough to half-stun Kerner. When he pressed the trigger again, the gun stopped at the fourth shot. Turning, he saw that the sergeant had been killed.

He rose and dodged behind the wall again. Blood seeped into his right eye from a cut on his forehead, his hands and face stung from several impacts of stone splinters. They had driven him off after firing a single magazine! The privates were gone, but to his surprise Granier was still there, holding a carbine in his shaking hands.

"Looks like the swine mean to fight back, eh?" he said, grinning.

He was thirty, five years older than Kerner. In civil life he was a school teacher. He had survived the Campaign of France, had been demobilized, had married. The new government of French North Africa had recalled him to the colors, and he had been depressed—he was not even sure that he had been mobilized legally!

"We've got to get out of this," Kerner told him.

"What's the use?" Granier shrugged. "If it doesn't come today, it will come tomorrow. They don't intend to have any of us survive. Why go on suffering, being cannon-fodder for the British?" He laughed nervously in Kerner's face. "All right, smart guy, report me for subversive utterances. I'll show you how to make that look silly."

He deliberately stepped from the shelter of the wall, remained erect in the open. He shouldered the gun and fired slowly, picking targets. He was changing clips when the mortar shells struck. Kerner saw him flung into the air, then fell himself.

When Kerner came to, he was flat on his face, his head ringing. He moved cautiously, found that he was not seriously hurt. He looked up. The angle of the building was gone, stones and bricks blown away; wooden joists jutted like splintered bones.

"Not my fault," he thought. "Not my fault. No mines, no cannon. Same old business."

Three men appeared, carrying light automatic rifles. They wore odd peaked caps, spoke in harsh German. They kicked about the debris, one bent down to pick up a rifle. They were big husky lads, weatherbeaten, sweating. Kerner knew it would be better to speak before



they saw he was alive. They might be glad to capture an officer. If he waited, they might shoot him.

Before he could make up his mind, they jogged off in answer to a hail. Kerner gave them time to get some fifty yards away before moving. He found that his canteen was intact, and took a long drink. Then he sat up. It was growing dark rapidly; the sky was lighted by distant flashes and flares. Motors churned on the road, and droned overhead; far-off machine-guns were chattering.

"Jumped us just before dark so that the American planes couldn't get here in time," he thought. "Good timing. But that means they'll hold only a few strong points—shouldn't be hard to get through their lines." But an immense weariness gripped him. Ambulance men were moving about the fields looking for wounded, and a hail would bring them. Within a few minutes, he would be comfortable, fed—but a prisoner. "No, better do what Granier did, if I haven't the guts to go on. Much better," he mused.

He had been a prisoner before: The Germans had captured him, in June of 1940, with what remained of his battalion, eighty-four men. For two months he had lived in a camp. He had escaped from a train taking prisoners into Germany—escaped without incident, without trouble, almost casually, because he spoke German well, with a genuine Baden accent. His father had been an Alsatian, his mother a Lorrainer, and he had spent his boyhood vacations with relatives on the border. He had learned the enemy's tongue by ear long before he had studied it in *lycée* and military school.

Since then, he had known French prisons. On reaching Morocco, he had, like most men of his age, tried to join De Gaulle's Free French. He had tried twice and failed twice. Each time, his record had avoided him an official trial, which would have meant a minimum of three years in a fortress cell. But he had spent dreary months as a prisoner, waiting for his case to be decided.

His only bit of genuine luck in the past years had been that he had taken no share in the resistance against the Americans. At that time, he had been stationed in inland Algeria. He could not understand that resistance: It had been rumored since late in September that the Americans were coming, and Kerner had heard some of the very men who had fired state openly that they would not resist, at a time when it was dangerous to make such statements.

He had welcomed his chance to fight the Germans again, had had high hopes. He had seen the American armored equipment, some British. Good stuff, quite a match for that of the enemy, in some cases better. The French had been promised arms of modern pattern. Those arms had not as yet come; but, perhaps in token of good faith, of willingness, thousands of French North African troops had been dispatched to Tunisia. It was perhaps unavoidable that mistakes should be made, Kerner thought, and he was suffering from a mistake. No mines, no cannon—Had Granier been right? Would 1943 repeat 1940?

It was completely dark when he found the will to rise, to walk. A thin rain was drumming on the ground, millions of tiny splashes receding into the darkness. Far to the north, cannon mumbled in the hills. Kerner had no means of knowing where the Germans had halted, and if they had stormed the village or failed. The French might be as near as three kilometers, or might be thirty. If he headed straight for the French lines he might be safe in a couple of hours; or again, morning might find him wandering inside the German advance zone.

If he turned and headed into the German lines, however, there was a chance that he would meet civilians, Frenchmen, who would hide him a while, obtain information, get him across the lines. As the roads were watched, he must keep to the fields. . . . He started due east.

It was a queer, fatiguing tramp; he was not seriously injured, but his cuts and abrasions throbbed, and from time to time, blood seeped again from the gash on his forehead. His whole body had been bruised by falls, and one of his knees ached. That made him walk tensely; he had to make a slight effort at each step to pull his boots from the slithering mud; the muscles in his legs started to hurt, then the pain spread to his groin, his abdomen.

The night was full of sounds—churning motors, muffled calls, whistles, the clicking of chains. The Germans were bringing up troops along the roads. Fortunately, the weary men, wet from the rain, paid no attention to isolated plodders. Three or four times, when he had to cross a path, Kerner feared he was lost, but the drivers cursed him in German and went their way. It would have taken a special form of obscure heroism for those chaps to get off the trucks and pursue a straggler through the muddy field. They were concerned with getting to the end of their trip and camouflaging the trucks, avoiding the winged death that the light would turn loose upon them.

At times, Kerner had to circle permanent posts. He saw soldiers gathered near sheet-iron stoves. Once he smelled something cooking, and that odor almost lured him into surrender; he had not eaten anything since ten the previous morning, and nothing hot for two days. He had to avoid villages and hamlets, for the Germans had sentries posted in them, traffic officials. Once seen, he would be lost, because of his uniform. He threw away his helmet, the peculiar shape of which would have betrayed him at a distance.

His best chance was an isolated farm, where he could obtain clothing. But he would have to be careful. There were many Italian colonists in this region—people who had prospered under French rule, yet had kept a sentimental attachment to their native land, and who had agitated for an Italian Tunisia. The occupation was too recent for them to have discovered what Fascism could be like, for them to regret the easygoing rule of the French Protectorate.

Kerner avoided bridges, waded across shallow streams. When the sky cleared for a while, he orientated himself. By one in the morning, he calculated that he had covered eight to ten kilometers in a straight line, by walking

probably about twenty. The traffic along the roads was growing scarcer now; it was probable that he had passed through the advanced zone of the German Army, but motorcycle patrols hurtled in the night.

He went down a long hill, followed the floor of a ravine. Pebbles rolled under his feet. He refilled his canteen at a brook. He must locate a farm, a house. He had to gamble, to run the chance that he would knock at the right door.

Then he heard a dog bark, and headed for the sound.

As he came nearer, a second dog howled, a third, a fourth. Kerner recognized the yapping of *douar* dogs, the bad-tempered curs of the Arabs. That was a thought—if he could obtain Arab garments, he could probably deceive the Germans. Many of the Tunisian natives were as heavy, as fair in complexion as he was. There had been no time for checking the population, for issuing German cards. Kerner felt sure he spoke Arabic well enough to answer the questions of a European.

There was a scurrying of paws; the barks came nearer, were more savage. Four dogs were circling him, dashing at his ankles, growling, yapping. Oddly, for a second, the thought of those fangs in the darkness alarmed Kerner more than the threat of a gun might have. He drew his pistol.

"Hello, somebody!" he called.

He had halted, and the dogs imitated him. They barked when he moved. They were smart curs; they had seen the gun even in the obscurity, knew what it was, and kept away. They darted forward only when he walked on; they would have been satisfied to see him leave. In a way, they were admirable, doing their job.

"Hello!" he shouted again.

"What do you want?" a voice called back, startlingly near.

"I've lost my way."

"Where do you want to go?"

That was a natural question, but an awkward one to answer at the time. Where did he want to go? He would have to tell the truth before long, anyway, so why not risk it now?

"French officer here—I need help to rejoin my regiment."

"The Germans are here."

"I know it—I was in the battle over there to the south."

"They shoot people who help the French." When Kerner did not reply to this, the stranger went on: "Can you pay?"

"I have a little money, yes."

"Come along; follow me." A stick thumped against a dog, a voice admonished the animals in guttural Arabic.

Kerner plodded on, with the dogs panting and sniffing at his ankles. His guide shouted, voices answered. There was a man ahead, several women, some children. A light appeared, suspended inside a sort of lean-to, made of canvas and wood. Indistinct shapes wandered about in the night.

"Come in. Leave the light here and fetch Omar, woman."

Kerner stopped, slid under cover, and sat down on a wooden coffer. The guide reached out to trim the storm-lantern hanging from the pole.

"Don't worry about that light," said a voice. "The hills are between us and the road. . . . What do you want?"

The speaker was a turbaned, gray-bearded native, with a kindly face—a herder, probably.

"Arab clothing, to get away. I'll pay what they're worth."

"What they are worth to you or to me?" The old man smiled. He made room for another man who had entered. "Omar, my daughter's husband," he explained.

"Greetings," said Omar.



"Greetings," Kerner acknowledged.

Omar was perhaps thirty—a swarthy, muscular man, with a face that was rough and fierce, thick lips, a hooked nose, cheeks hidden by a black beard, a single eye. He looked like the meanest of the Forty Thieves, but Kerner knew that no man could do much about the appearance Allah gave him. The old man explained the situation, but Kerner, accustomed to the Moroccan dialects, did not understand him too well. The villainous son-in-law rubbed dirty fingers in his beard, and cocked his eye on the officer.

"We have no clothing to sell you."

"Anything will do. A shirt, an old cloak and—"

"We have nothing save what we wear. We don't live here." Omar considered the Frenchman from head to feet. "Yes, in truth, the Germans would know you at sight. You must discard those things." He consulted with his father-in-law; and though Kerner made out words, he did not always understand their meaning. "All right," Omar said at last, "we shall take you to the dwelling of a friend, who has decent garments. But as it is night, and we run some risk, we must ask for pay."

"Yes. . . . How much?"

"Two thousand francs."

By local standards, the sum was enormous.

"One thousand, or I go by myself."

"Make it fifteen hundred. I'll have to give my wife two hundred." Omar spoke as if he were making a concession. "Paid here, in advance, in gold."

"Who has gold nowadays?"

"We know the Americans brought gold; they pay for everything in gold."

"I haven't seen any of it. Twelve hundred, in bills, paid when I reach your friend."

THE argument lasted for some time; then it was agreed that Kerner pay in French bills, twelve hundred and fifty francs—five hundred in advance, the balance at destination.

Kerner drew his wallet and counted out the five hundred francs. As he looked up, and saw the others' eyes on his money, he remembered that these chaps were Arabs, nomads; that such people are money-poor and greedy for cash—that, in many cases, they were not overburdened with scruples. His relief yielded to fresh worry.

"There is no need of two guides," he said.

"I don't know the way well; my father is old and cannot go alone."

Kerner loosened the pistol in the holster with a casual gesture, rose and backed out of the shelter. The old man put out the light, and both men followed him. It was very dark outside, and the rain had resumed.

"Quiet, quiet—" The natives were lashing about with their long sticks,—hitting dogs and children,—for each one carried a *matraque*, a solid club, a good weapon of defense—and often of attack.

"Come along, Lieutenant."

"You lead. I follow."

"As you wish." They both chuckled, and Omar added: "Do not worry, we are not thieves."

Kerner followed the faint outline of their white garments. He was no longer alone, but their presence brought small comfort; he had actually been safer before. But how could he have avoided them? Sooner or later, a fugitive must trust to others. Moreover, these chaps knew he had a pistol, and would decide it would be foolish to risk death or serious wounds for his wallet and clothing.

Yet his uneasiness grew with every stride.

AT one time, he made up his mind to let them gain some distance, then to lose himself in the night, hide. But they had the eyes and ears of cats, and a hail came at once: "No, not there, Lieutenant! This way!" He went on.

They knew they could kill him and never be suspected. No one knew where he was; no one could ever connect them with him. There must be many corpses in the fields and along the roads, and who would pay particular attention to just one more? Yes, from the time he had hailed the old man, he had been in their hands!

He thought of inventing a story, of telling them that a European doctor could tell easily if a man had come to his death by clubs and not from wounds. But this was childish; they knew no one would bother. No, he must rely on his alertness, his strength and skill. He cocked his pistol, knowing they would hear the snap.

"Be careful with the gun, Lieutenant."

He let down the hammer slowly. He should not put those fellows at the mercy of a slip or a stumble. Perhaps they wanted to help him and would be satisfied with a legitimate profit. Had they wished to rob him, would they be taking him so far? They had asked for a stiff price, which seemed a guarantee of good intentions. They could have invented many more plausible stories than the one they had given, for instance that they were taking him to a French farm.

"Careful, a root—"

He avoided the unseen obstacle. Evidently, they did not wish him to trip and fall—not yet. Or they might be afraid his pistol would go off. They halted and he grew tense. But they merely wished to listen.

"Cannon to the north," Omar announced. "Airplanes up, too." When he resumed walking, he talked over his shoulder, in fair French. He said he hoped the Germans would be driven out soon, and that the Americans would come. He would prefer the Americans to the British or the French. People said they were lavish with money and supplies. He had been told they had everything in profusion—chocolate, meat, cigarettes, canned milk, flour—and that they paid well for labor. Germans and Italians paid poorly, and with the last, one was not even sure of what had been promised.

"Where is this friend of yours?" Kerner asked.

"Not far, really. But we must avoid the roads and patrols."

"True."

"We shall be there in a few more minutes, Lieutenant. Do you fight for De Gaulle or Giraud?"

"I serve France, Omar."

"Ah, yes. My father lost an arm at Verdun, in 1916. And I have a young brother, a corporal in a Tunisian regiment. He was stationed at Sfax, which the French left. Maybe you know of him." Omar gave the name and full particulars. "These are sad days, Lieutenant."

"Things are getting better."

"It will not be difficult for you to pass through the Germans. Before they got here, many men escaped from them. They cannot guard every place."

They conversed in whispers for several more minutes, until interrupted by a sharp exclamation from the old man, a few yards ahead. They came upon him squatted in the mud, nursing an ankle. "I have hurt myself," he announced. "You go on alone."

"No, that cannot be," Omar protested. "If you are not there to guarantee me, the man will have naught to do with it; we have had arguments. You must walk. Here, I'll help you stand."

The old man groaned, but managed to cover a short distance before asking for a rest. Omar supported him, and said to Kerner: "You see? This man has bad luck—he cannot go far alone. His foot is bad since it was hurt in an accident." And he narrated the episode in detail, before the other was willing to start again.

Progress became slower and slower. It was now after three in the morning. Omar cursed the old man, who cursed him in return. Each new lap was shorter than the one before; the groans became louder, more pitiful.

"I'm tired out; the pain is too great." The old chap sighed. "And but four hundred yards to cover—five minutes for a well man! But Allah be praised, the limb is not broken. It is only delay."

Only delay—but that was almost as bad as death to Kerner, for with daylight, the Germans would resume their patrols in the hills, and search every dwelling. There would be no time then to find a hiding-place.

"Two hundred francs more," he promised.

The old man rose and gripped Omar. "Come, my son." He hobbled on.

Kerner stepped forward, slipped his hand under his arm on the other side, supported his weight. "See, Father, hardly any strain at all." But the position soon grew awkward, and finally he hoisted the man's left arm over his neck. "Hold to my shoulder, thus—"

Omar and the officer were literally carrying the old fellow, who gave directions in a low voice: "There is a tree—then two more—is that right? You feel the path under your feet?"

Suddenly, the old man seemed to slip; his hand clutched at Kerner's shoulder. Then the hand was across Kerner's face; he felt a pain in his eye. At the same time, the old man's lean legs wound about the Frenchman's, his right hand paralyzed Kerner's left arm.

"Quick, Omar!" the old man snapped.

Kerner felt the pistol torn from his fingers; the next instant, a blow struck him across the back of the head, dazing him. Fool that he was, he had been trapped—lulled into confidence by casual chatter and a fake accident! They had played a fine, tight game—and another such blow might knock him out completely. There was but one thing to do: He let himself fall backward, with the old man on top of him. In the darkness, Omar would find it hard to aim.

The old chap had a lot of nervous strength; his hands were hard and sinewy. Kerner doubled his leg, struck hard, upward, with his knee. The Arab screamed and rolled off. Kerner scrambled to his feet, was struck across the back and shoulder, went down again. It was painful, as if something had squirted mustard up his nostrils with great force. He felt his brain reeling—

Then he was running blindly, crashing through bushes.

"This way, Omar, I hear him!"



Before Kerner could straighten, Omar was there, warned by the yells.

The old man was running, near by; his feet slapped the soil hard. Kerner slid to a stop, gathered himself on his haunches and waited.

His temples were throbbing, and he was more afraid than he could remember having been, even the first time he had been under air bombardment. To be killed in battle was one thing; to be clubbed to death in the dark by a brace of mangy Arabs was quite another. Years of training, a losing war, an escape, two desertions, a moment of hope, a few minutes of fighting—and death. That would have been his life. . . .

"Where is he?"

"I don't see him."

"Watch—"

The pistol, his own pistol, flashed once, twice. The old man uttered an exclamation. Kerner rose and ran like a frightened animal. He was young, he was strong, but these chaps had clubs they knew how to use. He must get one of those clubs!

He selected the old man—Omar was younger, stronger. He could tell them apart by their voices. That was his advantage: They talked. He caught the old Arab about the knees, tore the stick from his hand, smote him hard. But before he could straighten again, Omar was there, warned by the yells.

Kerner caught one blow, two blows, on the stick. This was something he *could* do—fencing! He was pleased and started to laugh—he would not die tonight.

CHAPTER TWO

KERNER dreamed that he was sleeping on the floor of a moving truck. The road was rough, and he bumped about. The planking was like a grate, and the air came through and chilled him. At times the vehicle seemed to leap high in the air, to come down with a crash. He struggled for consciousness; his eyes opened, and for several seconds, he swam in nauseating swoops

through space. Then he saw the orange sky of dawn about him, as moist as if freshly sponged, with mottled clouds like bits of fleeces, and shadows skimming about swiftly, like swallows or bats around the old barns at twilight.

Then he knew that those shadows were planes, that the bumps were real enough, caused by jarring bomb explosions not very far away. Guns were pounding, and machine-guns clacked frantically.

"Attacked," he thought, "we're attacked!"

He tried to shout, to leap to his feet. His whole body flashed into pains; his head felt as if bursting. Then he was aware of a sensation of intense cold. He realized that he was stretched on the ground, not inside a truck. His mind struggled to recompose the pictures swirling in his thoughts, to still the sense of panic. Danger threatened; he must run, danger threatened!

He rose with a great effort, retched, bent over, sank to his knees. He fought unconsciousness, felt that his senses were about to sink again into that soft forgetfulness, like black cotton-wool, from which he had emerged. He remembered a bearded face hovering, a face with only one eye.

"Omar—" he said; that unlocked his memory, as a key unlocks a door.

Omar had knocked him on the head, and he had passed out. He must have been out for hours, too, for day had come. Those planes above were American or British; the firing came from the Germans, probably along the roads. Omar had knocked him out, but had not finished him.

Then Kerner noticed something that made him forget danger, Germans, and even escape: He was as naked as at the hour of his birth.

He stood there, nude under the sky, on a hillside. Nothing living was in sight. The crests of the hills shut off the road. The flyers above had other concerns than to contemplate his nudity. Yet the fact that he wore no clothing filled his mind. Omar and his father-in-law



had been thorough; they had left him nothing. His identity plaque had been stolen with the rest. He needed a hot meal, medical attendance, rest—but he would have compromised for a pair of shorts.

After a few seconds, he started to walk, crouching; he felt like an unsightly animal, muddy and sore. Try as he would, he could not bring himself to stand and stride naturally. He went on, ready to drop out of sight, following bushes and hedges as much as possible. Shivering, he found himself almost wishing for the Germans to appear. They would capture him, but at least they would give him something to wear.

"No use kidding," he mumbled, "those Arabs outsmarted me."

He gritted his teeth when he remembered his kind invitation to the old man to hang onto his neck. Then normal thinking reasserted itself: He had remained exposed to the damp and cold for hours; he might get pneumonia. His free hand reached gingerly for his head; on it he felt several large bumps. Why the sweeps of the club had not cracked his skull or broken his neck, he could not guess—perhaps because Omar was excited, and working in the dark. The wonder was that Omar had not made sure of his man by passing a knife twice or three times over Kerner's throat! One of his shoulder-blades might be fractured. It pained him enough to fear that.

"If I ever get the chance to see Omar again!"

If the United Nations occupied this region, he would have a chance. Omar was a local lad—and certainly men of his description were not many. Kerner's thoughts of what he would do, if and when, warmed him up somewhat. A dog loped across the field, looked at him casually, went on without barking. Kerner envied him his perfect ease of manner and his warm coat.

From a ridge he saw part of the road winding in the distance with men and machines moving on its surface again. The planes had vanished. There was a sizable farm two or more kilometers away. Kerner limped on, shivering and sneezing; he might hail someone—but with war activities so near, the inhabitants probably were huddled inside, and he would have to confront them all at one time.

A few hundred yards from the road, he followed a shallow depression. He was beginning to hope again. If he could keep out of sight until he reached the farm, he might talk his way out of this mess. In between spells of

shuddering, he could even see a bit of humor in his plight.

He halted—a man was laying on the ground not many yards away, in the lee of two brownish boulders. He seemed asleep, but as Kerner came nearer, he saw that the man was dead, a dead German. Several men had sojourned there for a while, it was evident, from tracks and cigarette-butts. The man wore pants and shirt; but the shirt was rigid with blood, the pants lacerated. Kerner saw what had happened: There was a tourniquet far up on the corpse's thigh. The man had been hit, probably while on the road, and comrades had taken him aside to give him first aid. He had died while they were working, and they had lingered awhile. They seemed to have taken away everything but these two garments—including the man's boots.

No, not everything: The dead man's head rested on a khaki greatcoat, folded to form a pillow. The others had forgotten it, or had been unwilling to touch the fellow again, fighting-men being given to illogical pieties. Even Kerner found himself reluctant to touch the body, because of its attitude of perfect relaxation after strenuous work. And when he had withdrawn the coat, he was concerned and sorry, because the head, in falling back, had lost its aspect of repose.

The coat fitted fairly well, for although the dead man had been smaller than Kerner, such garments are cut to give room and freedom of movements. He tried to make bandages for his sore feet from some discarded puttees, but gave that up. Neither did he act upon the idea of searching the dead man's trouser-pockets.

THUS he walked on barefooted, the coat flapping about his knees. After a while, mechanically, he investigated the pockets. The booty was meager: A rumpled package containing two mangled cigarettes, no matches, the wrapper off a tablet of chocolate, dust, bits of fleece, two metal buttons, and two thin, worn letters, addressed to *Oberschütze Haller, Franz, Postal Sector XI-311*. He scanned the clumsy German script on the flimsy pages. They were as empty of meaning as a stranger's mail is likely to be. Instead of throwing them away, he put them back in the inside pocket, perhaps with some dim plan to return them to the sender in the future with a word of explanation.

"Stupid idea, that! Fact is, I don't even know if it's his coat. Another man might have slipped it under his head, then left it, perhaps because of the smell and stains." For he had not acquired the garment three minutes when he started to find defects.

Nevertheless, he felt like a new man inside the garment, until he tried to run. Then he discovered that his cure was mental, for unless he set his feet down with care, he jolted pains into his entire frame. He had lost sight of the farm now, and he climbed to the crest of a hill to locate it.

At the top, he came face to face with men going in the opposite direction, a German patrol composed of a sergeant and four men. The noncom was very tall, heavily built, and seemed out of temper.

"And where do you come from?"

"I was back there." Kerner motioned vaguely over his shoulder.

"You were back there; you were back there!" The German had green tabs on his collar, the exact hue of his eyes. He was disgusted and had the face to express it—broad, rough, tanned, with a sheen of blond beard fringing the hard jaws: "So, my fine, handsome, plucked rooster, you were back there!"

Other uniformed men had come up—ambulance men, some carrying rolled-up stretchers. Their leader, a stout little fellow with a snub nose and glasses, came forward briskly, took Kerner's wrist.

"This man is ill, Sergeant. I'd advise you—"
"You do your job and I'll tend to mine, Sanitation-Noncom Wolff."

"I'm doing mine."

"What's your name?" the big noncom asked. "Report yourself, can't you?"

Kerner thought of giving the name on the letters, of inventing a unit. Then he decided against it for two reasons: Some of these chaps might know the man, and he had forgotten the name. He swayed on his bare feet, gulped, sneezed, and said: "Yes, Sergeant."

Soldiers do not need much to laugh. They laughed.

"Then, by the mighty sacraments, do so!"

"The man is dazed," the ambulance noncom intervened. "You'll bewilder him."

"He's a straggler."

"Possibly, he was a straggler. But observe, Sergeant, that he has evidently suffered a bad beating, perhaps wounds—probably from native marauders. They won't learn not to stray far from the roads. He is a sick man, suffering from exposure, loss of blood, and shock. If he is shamming, he will be found out. Meanwhile, I'll hold you responsible for—"

"I want his name."

"What is your name, my friend?"

When Kerner did not reply, the little chap felt his pockets, drew out the letters and read off the name and indications, which the other sergeant noted on a pad. "Private Knapp, lead this man to the ambulance."

"Come along, then, that's the lad," Knapp invited. He walked ahead until they were some distance from the rest, on the way to the road. "It's an old dodge, man," he said, "and unless you're sharp, the surgeon'll spot it."

"An old dodge?"

"Yes. Going nuts, throwing off all your clothes. Keeping the coat is bad—it shows you can feel cold, know what you're doing. Wolff pretended to fall for it, because he's been arguing all morning with the big guy." Knapp moved his head in a sidelong gesture of pity. "And it's funny, but when you try to get pneumonia, you can't. Inside of three days, you'll be marked *Fit*, and go to the front with a fortnight's special duty hung on your behind. They'll stick you with Rommel's little lads." He indicated a big car marked with red crosses, on the road. "I have to go back. There's the ambulance; get in there and cover up. But if the English fly over, don't listen to anybody—get out and lie in the fields."

"I heard some bombs, awhile back."

"Why the devil do you think we're here? There were sixteen of them; they bombed the guts out of a supplies-column. You'll see some of the wrecks around the bend. One lot, you could have picked up with a rake. Hold it—" Knapp fastened a tag onto one of Kerner's buttons. "Want a cigarette?"

"Please."

But after two puffs, Kerner coughed, retched and was sick. The ambulance man retrieved the cigarette for himself. "You're sick, all right," he said, smiling. "I can always tell, with that trick! So long."

CHAPTER THREE

"**G**RANATSCHOCK, ja," the inspecting *Oberfeldarzt* told the young medical corps captain three days later. He had questioned Kerner for all of two minutes, being a great believer in careful examination of individual cases.

Kerner, temporarily known as Franz Haller—a man of that name was missing from his unit at the front—stood rigidly at attention. He resembled a Hindu rather than a German soldier, for his head was wrapped in gauze. A total of thirty-two stitches had been taken in his scalp,



and the surgeon had called in others to behold a skull as solid as a gun-turret. For the rest, Kerner wore a fatigued German blouse, and like many of the men in the hospital, French trousers seized in a barracks somewhere in Tunisia.

The lieutenant-colonel went on as if Kerner could not hear him, explaining his case, with proper Latin words. Of course the captain understood, he was certain, that the amnesia was nervous, not real. The subject did not want to return to his unit and had forgotten that unit, really forgotten it. It did not matter much, as he was not really fit for active duty, and could be employed at light tasks about the establishment.

"You may leave, Haller," the captain said, between nods and amazed smiles.

Kerner left, and went to the small room where the orderlies gathered for rest and for card games. The hospital was established in a former girls' school, and there were pious images left on the walls. Sometimes, when a piece of furniture was moved, caricatures of lady professors would be revealed.

No one doubted his identity as a German. He had an accent, yes, but many of those about him had regional accents. Moreover, like most soldiers, most men, patients and orderlies were not curious about others, preferring to talk of themselves. Kerner's willingness to help with chores, his ready smile, had won him consideration.

It so happened, too, that he was but one of four cases in the hospital who had been found nude, or practically nude, in the open, stripped by native looters, after being clubbed into unconsciousness. A fifth case had come in and died of a fractured skull. An orderly had shown Kerner the report made out by an officer concerning him: Haller, Franz, had probably been wounded by a bomb fragment on the road, and wandered off, partially stunned, to fall into the hands of bandits. Some of the lacerations definitely appeared to be caused by explosions. He had suffered from a slight congestion, rapidly cleared up. Only one serious spell of fever, on the first night.

"You were funny, Franz," the orderly informed him. "You thought you could speak French and jabbered at a great rate."

Kerner's first concern had been to locate himself. He had come a long way in the ambulance, knew that he was well beyond the fighting zone. He was in the hospital at Bir-Khassan. From a pamphlet owned by one of the

doctors, he discovered that this place had in normal times about eight thousand inhabitants, some manufacturing—oil and charcoal—and a *syndicat d'initiative*, a sort of Chamber of Commerce. He had passed by the town on the railroad four or five times on his way to and from Tunis, and had never been conscious of the name.

His first important discovery, made on the morning of the third day, had been that his status as a German might impede his escape. He had strolled out of the yard, crossed the road to a café. Other Germans were there, mostly privates of the transports. After a moment's hesitation, he had gone to the bar, behind which sat a stout dark-haired Frenchwoman. He had whispered in French to her that he was French and wanted to get away, that he had no money. She had summoned her husband, a hulking middle-aged man with gray curly hair. The *patron* had led him into the street again. And spoken firmly:

"I don't know what the game is, and I don't care. If you're trying to get free drinks because you talk French, that's out. If you're sent to see if we help deserters, we don't. The next time you show your face in my place, I go right over to your police and report you. Good day."

Kerner understood that it would be as hard to convince Frenchmen while in German uniform that he was one of them, as it would have been to convince Germans while wearing a French uniform. The more intelligent his listener, the more details he gave to prove he was French, the more he would appear like an *agent provocateur* or a spy. The only sure method of deceiving people was to permit them to deceive themselves. Possibly, if Kerner went to the medical captain now and told him who he was, the young officer would nod, agree with him, and remain sure he was a victim of shock, who just happened to speak French. A surprising number of Germans spoke French, some of them very well.

MOST of the Germans were optimistic about the war, about the Tunisian Campaign in particular. Rommel's veterans had demonstrated that they were able to punch holes through the vaunted American armored material at will. It was all a question of getting enough divisions out to Africa for a real drive, and that would be done as soon as the Air Force had made the strait between Sicily and Tunisia untenable to the British surface ships.

There were Italian officers in town, and a few troopers, but there was little fraternizing. And it was noticeable that a distinction existed among the Germans themselves, between the men freshly arrived in Africa and the gaunt, leathery veterans of Rommel's Afrika Korps. Some of the newcomers, who had served in Russia, were inclined to resent any show of superiority.

"In Russia, you wouldn't be safe around the corner," they said.

They brought protests from the cases who had been beaten and robbed by Arabs. On the third day, after being accepted by the lieutenant-colonel surgeon, Kerner learned that he would never take personal vengeance on Omar and his father-in-law. Eight native looters, in whose homes German goods and equipment had been found, had been executed in the yard of the *gendarmérie*. An eye-witness described the one-eyed man with the black beard, and the old one who had spat at the sergeant's feet as he walked to face the rifles.

Kerner was uneasy at the mention of firing-squads. He had not sought to disguise himself as a German; the status had been forced upon him. But if he was found out to be a French officer, there would be no doubt in the others' minds that he had been a spy. They would be the more pitiless because he was an Alsatian, hence by now technically a German subject.

Late that afternoon, the medical captain sent for him.

"Did you ever wait on tables, Haller?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Right, you don't know. Well, it's not very hard, you know. I have been asked to send a convalescent for such duty at an officers' mess in town. The food will be a bit better than here; the atmosphere better for you, too. How's the shoulder? A little stiff yet, eh? That'll pass."

An orderly took Kerner across town—an ordinary small town of North Africa, with one or two little parks shaded by palms, monuments to the dead of various campaigns. Looking down a street toward the station, he saw traces of bombardment.

"Big planes, American planes," the orderly said. "Came in daylight."

"They'll be here again, then."

"Maybe. Not for long. We have a lot of pursuit machines coming over, shifted from Russia." The man again outlined the theory of victory that was growing familiar. Rommel's retreat was a strategic one, to gather and mass the total Axis forces in North Africa. Spain would come in at the critical moment.

Kerner was introduced to a mess-sergeant at his destination. He admitted knowing nothing of waiting on tables, and the other, after grumbling, said that perhaps it was better, he would thus have less to unlearn. The duties were simple, and after two or three rehearsals, the noncom was satisfied.

"They'll bawl you out, but they'd do that no matter how much you knew. Just look scared and sorry, and let them yell. Don't make any excuse, give no explanation. Let them talk."

"Yes, Sergeant."

Kerner learned that the officers he was to serve belonged to various administrative branches, and had offices on the ground floor. A few were attached to the staff of a general officer who resided across the street, in a small hotel, *Au Vrai Mazagran*. There were those with dark green collar-tabs, some with carmine, or bright red, or dark red—policemen, technicians, judiciary members. They ate at separate tables, mixed little.

After his lean years in Africa, Kerner found the food abundant and good. He filled many slips for French and Algerian vintage wines, for liquors. There was a good deal left over for cooks, orderlies, waiters, as some of the officers dined in town, or attended night-clubs.

A major, tall and built like an athlete, with a big face that seemed carved out of tallow, brought some documents to the table with him, scanned them as he ate. Kerner was careful, and the man, who was some sort of military prosecutor or investigator, nodded approval.

"You appear alert and intelligent. Do you speak French?"

"No, Herr Major."

"Excellent."

That was all. But the mess-sergeant stopped Kerner when he was about to leave for the hospital: "You can bunk in with the others, in the garage back of the house. Major Mohring wants you as a day orderly. Hang around the anteroom of his office, bring in people, keep an eye on them. You're allowed to sit down. Soft snap."

It was all of that. But it interfered with Kerner's private plans. He was kept busy most of the day, and other soldiers accompanied him during his few hours of leisure. His problem, that seemed so simple of solution, proved difficult. He could not make contact with French people without attracting attention from the Germans. And he had under his eyes the efficiency of their machine, knew that once he caused suspicion, he would be exposed inside twenty-four hours. . . .

Major Mohring was not a harsh boss. He liked to eat big sandwiches and drink beer, between meals. His duties were multiple. Chiefly, he appeared to be a sort of liaison man between the military police of the Army

and the civilian officials. At least, some of the voluminous dossiers on his table concerned thefts, smuggling of drugs, white slavery. His callers belonged to two categories: Poor-looking Frenchmen who came under military escort, and worried, well-dressed Frenchmen, some of them officers in uniform, possibly caught by the sudden invasion of Tunisia before they could make up their mind whether they should answer "Giraud" or "Petain."

Sometimes, the well-dressed Frenchmen would return with a police escort; at other times, Kerner would see them in the hallways, being taken to another office, for what was termed "more intensive questioning." Sometimes Major Mohring would have a stenographer present; sometimes the interviews would be private.

KERNER sat in the anteroom. A sergeant in the hall would question visitors, send them with an orderly to the door. The orderly would give Kerner a slip with a name written down. Kerner would knock on the inner door, open it, read the name. Mohring would say: "In a minute," or "Show him in." On occasion, the Major would offer a visitor a drink.

On the fourth day, in midafternoon, the hall orderly brought a tall, distinguished Frenchman, forty-eight or fifty years old, with a lean pink face crested with gray hair, ornamented by a clipped black mustache.

"Monsieur Gaston Senechal," Kerner announced.

"Bring him in."

Kerner held the door; Senechal entered. The orderly heard the first casual greeting and closed the door. He resumed his seat and picked up a German newspaper two days old. He read about an athletic meet in Holland, where the population had applauded the victory of a German team; touching stories, on the inside pages, about the love of children for their big brother, the German soldier; food riots in the United States.

The outer door opened after a discreet knock. Kerner rose and stepped forward. The hall orderly stood there, looking sheepish, and a young woman was at his side—a

French girl, not more than twenty, with large flashing brown eyes.

"Looking for her father," the orderly explained.

"Please, monsieur—I heard he had been taken away from the house. I must see him—"

The orderly obligingly translated for Kerner. The Alsatian stared at the girl, and understood why both the sergeant and his colleague had risked a reprimand. She was almost weeping, and she was beautiful.

"Is her father Herr Senechal?"

"Yes, Senechal." She repeated the name. "I must see him." She laid a small hand on Kerner's chest and pushed. He was a moderately large man, but the touch moved him back like a feather. He grinned amiably, nodded, knocked on the inner door, opened it and informed the Major. Mohring spoke to the Frenchman, and the two came out into the anteroom together. The girl wept as she clung to her father. He smiled, stroked her shoulder.

"Misunderstanding, she believed I was arrested. . . . Major Mohring, my daughter."

The big German smiled, bowed: "Mademoiselle—enchanted!" He straightened and laughed: "There is no need to worry, yet! Monsieur your father is here on business."

"There is nothing wrong, then?" the girl asked.

"No. Go now, dear."

Mohring and Senechal went into the office after a few more words. The girl stopped by the door, opened her purse and powdered her nose. She smiled at Kerner gratefully, and beckoned him nearer. Her hand reached out: he put his own forward to meet it; then she was gone, leaving a twenty-franc bill in his palm.

The sergeant, Ed, said he and his wife still fought. "You don't get along with her folks," Ed analyzed. "Neither do I."



Without real reason, Kerner was furious. Of course, with the cap pulled over a skull swathed in gauze and in his makeshift uniform, he was not prepossessing. In fact, he had laughed at his reflection in the mirror, because he looked so bovine and Teutonic. And what else could a French girl do to show appreciation to a German orderly? "Snobbish little dame," he thought.

But his irritation did not dwindle. She was right—he was only a lout who deserved a tip. After a week in German hands, he was reconciling himself to the life; he was not really looking for escape. The arrogant, self-conceited little animal—but he could remember her lashes beaded with tears, the moistness of her full lips parted in an impersonal smile. He would save that bill, and give it back to her, some day, when he came around as an officer. Might ask her to autograph it, as the only tip he had ever received—

HE had not sat down; he was standing near the door, and he heard a murmur of voices. The Major had not closed the door tightly. He heard Mohring's almost-too-precise French:

"So you believe, monsieur, that they should be watched?"

"Yes, Major. Both of them are bad cases. They served in the Light Infantry of Africa, you know." (The battalions of Light Infantry of Africa are the famous *Bat' d'Af*, which receive as recruits the graduates of French reform-schools and prisons.) "They remained in Tunisia upon discharge. Since then, they have become agitators, Communists, naturally. I employed one of them as a foreman at one time, but he proved insolent, ungrateful, a troublemaker. They have dabbled in everything illegal since, and turned their talents to profit during these troubled times. After the American landings and before your troops arrived, they boasted openly that they had aided a number of British officers to escape internment by our Government."

"Sounds serious."

"Nice chap, this," Kerner thought; "squealing to the Boches!"

He was not too surprised, for he had heard such conversations before. Not a few wealthy men told Mohring that they were on the side of organization and discipline, and that patriotism itself made them side with Germany against the others for the welfare of France. They deplored acts of sabotage committed by unknown parties on various means of communications. And they feared that the Arabs, given representation under a democratic system that took no account of racial differences, would get out of hand very quickly.

After Senechal had left, the Major put in several telephone calls. In five or ten minutes a small party came in—three German policemen and a French civilian. The last was evidently a workman, a rather short, wiry chap in the middle forties, with a reddish nose and an unkempt, old-style mustache. Mohring did not rise; there were no bows, no exchanges of polite words. The door was not closed. Kerner stood inside the office.

"Where is the other?" Mohring snapped in German.

"Couldn't find him, Major. He's being sought."

"I want him before night." The officer consulted the documents before him. "What's your name?" he asked the workman.

"Querlain, Jean-Baptiste."

"Ah, yes. You are at present plying the trade of cabinetmaker. You served a term at La Roquette prison, another at Fresne. After your military service, you were in prison in Algeria for six months, for smuggling and concealment. You were married and your wife left you, taking two children. You drink—"

"And eat. One has to live," Querlain admitted calmly.

"Call me 'Major' when you address me."



"I'm not in the army, monsieur, so I never use titles."

"As you wish, although it would pay you to be polite. Have you any comment to make on what I have read?"

"None. Save that I am pleasantly surprised that I am so well known in Berlin."

"Humor is unnecessary, my friend!"

"Maybe to you. I find it helps."

Kerner repressed a smile. He knew the type; Major Mohring would not have the last word.

"I'm informed that you know something of the underground system in town—in fact that you publicly boasted of having worked for it before the arrival of the German forces of occupation."

"Oh, one dabbles in this or that, to pass the time."

"You know that this pastime is likely to lead to the firing-squad?"

"Oh, no sir." Querlain's face was awed. "I didn't know it was dangerous."

"You're an intelligent man—"

"Thank you."

"Don't interrupt. You're an intelligent man; you can be satisfied with being held for a while, or you can be shot in the morning. I shall send you before another magistrate, where you will give the information asked of you. We'll be good friends, you'll be comfortable, there may even be something in it for you."

"No kidding, sir? Money?" Querlain's face fell. "The trouble is, sir, I don't know anything. I have a bad



*Illustrated by Herbert
Morton Stoops*

"There is no need to worry. Monsieur your father is here on business."

memory, and, as you see in your notes, I drink. Then I pick up yarns I've heard here and there, take them for myself,"—he imitated a sheepish grin to perfection,—
"and I get into trouble."

"We have methods to make you talk."

"I doubt it," Querlain stated calmly. "You are surprised? I came to Africa to serve in the *Bat' d'Alf*. I was supposed to stay eighteen months; I was kept six years—every camp, every prison. Nobody ever made me talk when I didn't want to; nobody ever made me shut up when I wanted to and was conscious. I'll see how the German police work." He grinned. "Maybe some day I'll write my memoirs for the newspapers and compare the systems."

"Perhaps you'll tell me where your best friend has gone?"

"Oh, that? Yes, sir. He's in London, conferring with his bankers."

"Take him away. Keep him overnight." Mohring dismissed the police. "Orderly!"

"At your orders, Herr Major!" Kerner came to attention. The officer's eyes inspected him from head to foot: "Try to get a decent outfit. Tell the sergeant I spoke to you." And, as Kerner was about to go, relieved, Mohring went on softly: "You told me you didn't speak French."

"That is right, Herr Major."

"You followed the deposition just now with attention."

"I understand many words, Major. I seem to remember—perhaps I served in France, Major."

"Perhaps? Aren't you sure where you served?"

"I—I am a shock case, Major. I don't always remember—"

He felt perspiration oozing down his spine. He had underestimated Mohring, who had found time to watch the faces of the spectators. He was in a very tight spot; for, once suspicious, these people investigated, neglected no details. To his astonishment, Major Mohring put his head back and laughed.

"Forgive me, my lad. I'm laughing at myself." Mohring managed to get his breath. "You see, I have been cursing because everybody they sent me was stupid, unintelligent. And the one choice I make for myself—I select a mental case! Comic, isn't it, colossally comic! Now, to work!"

Kerner ushered in a stout Italian woman, who had sent word that she had important information. She wanted a number of her neighbors put in jail, for having insulted Mussolini, the king and emperor, the Italian Army. Most of them were spies and signaled the enemy's planes, pointing out the spots to drop bombs.

"Every charge will be investigated, madam," Mohring assured her. "Keep your good, patriotic watch, and report weekly to the sergeant in the hallway. Not at all, madam, not at all—no bother. We Germans are jealous of the good repute of our gallant Allies."

AFTER dinner that night, and following the British air raid on the station, Kerner went across the street to the hotel's café. There was a room for officers, and a smaller one, with a zinc-topped bar, for noncoms and privates. He had twenty francs to spend, and had decided not to keep the bill for autographing.

There was a shortage of food in town, but no shortage of liquor. The German soldiers were provided with occupation money. A half-breed Moorish girl waited on tables, slapping her sandals about, reproving the overbold in five languages. The owner, a thick-set man with a pot-belly, came in from time to time, hung up the dark coat he wore in the hotel proper, and took his ease behind the bar, jiggling out doses of liquor with an expert hand. From time to time, he consulted a big gold watch nestled in the pocket of his spotted vest.

"What's keeping Querlain, Aristide?" another man called.

"I don't know. We'll have to start the game without him and Jules."

"Not much fun, two-handed."

"No. But for lack of grouse, one eats blackbirds."

Kerner considered the boss for a long time. Under the fat was what was left of a pretty tough man, he decided. And he saw, beneath the rolled-up sleeves, blue and pink tattoos. The man was a veteran of the African Army, probably of the Light Infantry battalion. After a while, Aristide joined the man who had spoken at a table in a corner, and they played two-handed *belote*, rather listlessly. Kerner rose and went to stand by, watching the game. The owner peered at him once or twice over his shoulder, seemed annoyed, but said nothing.

"He wants to learn," the other suggested, with irony.

"Bah, he has no dough to pay for lessons."

His presence made them nervous, and they played hastily. In dealing, a card slid across the table, fell to the floor. Kerner and Aristide bent to pick it up.

"Querlain's arrested," Kerner whispered.

He straightened and laid the card on the table. Aristide took it, slid it on the bottom of the deck, and played the hand out. And another. Kerner was beginning to think he had not heard, not understood, when the stocky man rose. He did not speak, did not look back. But somehow, Kerner knew that he was to follow without attracting attention from his German comrades. A minute later he went through the rear door into a courtyard. A door across the way opened, and Aristide led him into a storeroom, cluttered with empty crates, boxes, bottles.

"What was that about Querlain?" He listened and added: "I didn't see him; no one told me." And after a pause, as if to explain: "I live across the street, you know."

"I think he was brought in a car. I'm telling you he's arrested. They may be questioning him at this moment. They suspect that he has been mixed in the sabotage of telegraph lines near here."

"Who are you, exactly?"

"I'm a French officer."

"Really?" It would be hard to describe the cold humor of Aristide's tone. "Any of your pals in there likely to miss you very quickly? No? Then follow me. We can talk better comfortably." He led the way up a steep ladderlike stairway in back. "Don't move about, I'm looking for the lamp."

"Right."

Kerner had no sooner spoken than strong arms were locked around his own, hands gripped his legs, and he felt the unmistakable pressure of a steel tip on his throat. "One squeal, and you're bled white," someone growled. A match was scratched, and a stable-lantern lighted. Kerner found himself seated on a chair, facing a window over which thick black cloth had been nailed. There were several men behind him.

"All right, Boche-mug. Now, what's the game? No, don't turn your head—you'd get a crick in the back. Tell us what happened about Querlain."

Staring at the black curtain, Kerner related his story. "Go and fetch what's needed, kid," Aristide's voice said. A man left.

"He's telling the truth about Omar and his father-in-law." Another man was speaking. "But then, the Boches know it, since they arrested and shot them for looting. That's one good thing they did around here. And Querlain hasn't showed up tonight. What's fishy is that talk about Querlain having shot off his mouth. He's pretty careful."

"A Frenchman by the name of Senechal reported him," Kerner said.

"Gaston Senechal?" Aristide laughed. "You picked the wrong one."

"I don't know," the other man declared. "He was across the street this afternoon. His kid was in my shop, asking if it was true he'd been arrested by the Germans. Their housekeeper had told her a military policeman had come with a summons from the *Kommandantur*. And since Querlain got his best weavers to hold out for more dough, around 1928, Senechal's had it in for him."

"But he wouldn't get square that way!"

"Because he has money? Because he's a reserve officer? That's a laugh. You're getting to be a snob, Aristide, since you've made your pile—you and your old woman."

"Drop it, drop it, Justin." The door opened; the man sent on an errand had returned. "Now, you, give us your full name. . . . Kerner, Charles-Stanislas? What year did you enter military school? When did you graduate?"

"Bah, he can have read the annual, too," Justin's drawling, coarse voice put in. "What does that mean? Nothing. Why didn't you tell me, Aristide, that you wanted to check up on him? —Eh, you, what regiment were you with in Africa?"

Kerner gave the number of a Moroccan *tirailleurs* outfit. He named the colonel, the battalion commanders, the captains.

"What does that Captain Lehagle look like?"

Kerner described a veteran officer, to the mole on his cheek, to a missing finger-joint of the left hand.

"What's his nickname?"

"The Moroccans call him 'No Sugar.' But I heard that he used to be called 'Wooden God' in the Light Battalions."

"Yes, because he was always yelling 'Holy wooden god!'" Justin broke into a laugh. "He's all right, Aristide."

"Just proves he served where he claims, not that he was an officer, or that he hasn't sold out to the Boches. He admits being an Alsatian—"

"I boast of it," Kerner asserted.

THEY untied him then, allowing him to turn around. There were six men in the room; with the exception of Aristide, they were poorly dressed. Not one was under forty-five, save the owner's son, a sturdy boy of fourteen. Probably they were former inmates of the African Battalions and penal camps, like Querlain. Kerner had long known that these anti-militarists often became ardent patriots.

"We'll get you out," Aristide promised. "Through the lines, if you wish, or to a British ship offshore, the way we'd do with their interned aviators. Or you can stick around and wait for the Americans to arrive—"

"If they do," a skeptical member put in.

"They will," Aristide nodded. "And why? Because war is a business, and they're good business men. They know that to get anything, they'll invest what's needed, so they don't worry—"

"Oh, hell," Justin exclaimed. "He's off!"

"I'd like to start as soon as possible," Kerner said.
"Too late, tonight—and you were seen coming in here. Tomorrow, you head for the hospital, as if you were going to see some pals. And walk right by—keep going. Some one will show up to guide you."

"What time?"

"After you eat, at night. There's a short lag between patrols then."

Kerner shook Aristide's hand and left.

CHAPTER FOUR

ESCAPE becomes easier with experience, like anything else. . . . Kerner had learned one lesson, to conform to events and not to undertake to change them. So he was not too bewildered the following morning, at ten o'clock, when the mess-sergeant informed him that his connection with the Major was over, and that he was to report at once at the hospital. He was worried at first, but when he reached his destination, he discovered that all but the seriously wounded were being moved. There was fighting along the front; soldiers were needed; convalescences were cut short. Due to his bandage, Kerner was slated to go north, to Tunis itself.

New troops were coming into town, troops landed not long before. The motorized and armored units were mostly German, the infantry Italian. The last played themselves through the streets, but the cheering from their local compatriots was not as strong as previously. Rumor had it that the Italians were incorporating their subjects of military age, redeemed from their French oppressors, into their army. It was one thing to cheer victories and quite another to help win them.

Kerner was supplied with another paper—he was acquiring a small collection of passes and certificates. Franz Haller was to board a bus for the north, with many other "lightly wounded and casualties" at two-fifteen that afternoon, in the hospital courtyard, weather and enemy's aviation permitting. He avoided that by the simple expedient of keeping out of sight when the bus went. The sergeant in charge yelled the name a few times, was hurried by a colleague, shrugged, swore and was off. Other men, bustling about in their preparations to leave, jostled Kerner aside and never asked him a question.

British or American planes mauled the convoys of trucks on the roads that afternoon. A lone machine bombed a train two miles out of the station and wrecked it; another made hash of a company of Italian infantry in a field.

From conversations with other men, with new wounded, Kerner gathered that things were not going so well. The British were pushing up from the south; the Americans had recovered after their check, and were advancing from the west. The fighting, while not as constant and relentless as in Russia, nevertheless was sharp and murderous, and casualties ran high. The American equipment was proving excellent. Some concern was felt by the soldiers because it had been learned that members of staffs and administrations were being moved away from the lines instead of toward them. Also, replacements of tanks and material was slow and uncertain. There were trained crews quartered in town, waiting for new stuff.

Kerner fought against overconfidence, but the atmosphere reminded him somewhat of that prevailing in French bases late in May, 1940. Soon after sunset, in the confusion attending the arrival of a batch of casualties, he walked away. And in an hour he was safe, for the time, in a house on the outskirts of the town. He changed into ordinary civilian clothing and burned his German papers. His posing as Franz Haller was over.

He saw no one but the family with which he lived, on whose police slip he was registered as a cousin. The



man worked for Monsieur Aristide, and brought him news: There was nothing to be done now, the countryside was overrun with troops and military police. They were searching the farms of the region, looking for British parachutists who had dropped to destroy a power-plant.

More days passed. He had learned to wait.

At times it occurred to him that his situation was not peculiar. All over the world men were hiding, trying to escape, on one side or the other. There were millions of prisoners, and hundreds of thousands of fugitives. He must be patient. Nevertheless, he insisted that his host speak to Aristide, press his need to move on.

One afternoon the woman of the house called Kerner. "They come for the photographs for the passport," she declared, pointed at two charming, well-dressed women. One sank into immediate insignificance—for the other was Miss Senechal, who had given him twenty francs.

The girls could come openly, to bring or take away clothing that the woman had washed and mended. Concealing a camera was very easy for them. But even in Tunisia, where the Axis forces were thinly spread out and military rule consequently less strict, they risked severe punishment. As neither one was expert with the camera, Kerner helped them with technical advice. There was much lively discussion and a good deal of giggling, as he posed, full face, then profile. He had taken off the gauze, and his hair was growing in stiff and brush-like.

"A little more this way; lift the chin; no, don't glare—"

Kerner learned that the young girls were both ardent De Gaullists, and had been from the beginning. Before the Germans and Italians had come, they had taken active part against the rules of the Vichy government. Miss Senechal was named Marie-Louise, but her friend called her "Maryse." The other's name was Yvette.

As they took leave, Maryse looked up into his face and said: "I feel I've seen you before, Mr. Charles."

"That's an old one!" Her friend laughed shrilly.

Kerner had been warned not to reveal to anyone that he had worn a German uniform in town. People could not testify, or be pressed to, if they knew nothing. But that simple remark had a magnificent effect upon his morale. During the next few days his duty to rejoin the army came into his mind oftener than his need to escape. He hoped Maryse would return before he was on his way.

The air raids continued, and when the wind was right he could hear the faint rumbling of cannon, echoing through the hills.

Maryse came again on the third day, with samples of the pictures. They were as stark and brutal as passport pictures must be. She announced that Monsieur Aristide had copies, but that he had found difficulties in obtaining a false passport; the demand for such documents was great, and the military police were picking up the owners, neutral or not, for questioning. He sent word that Mr. Charles did not need to worry—at the rate the Americans and British were advancing, he would be free again, without moving, before a month had passed.

Maryse had heard that the passage of the strait had become so dangerous for surface shipping, because of the British Navy, that even gasoline was being flown across by the Germans.

Kerner had not told his hosts his real name, nor anything about himself, and they were risking their liberty for him. But that first afternoon alone, he told the girl that he had a mother and a married sister in France, that he liked pastry, that he was half-Alsatian—important or trivial items, as they occurred to him. Before long, he admitted having been engaged to a German girl.

"I was eighteen, very young, you understand. But after I entered military school, we drifted apart. No doubt she saw that it would be impossible,—as I did,—especially when it became obvious the war would start again. Still, I feel sad for her and her family; they were not Nazis,—far from it, indeed,—and they laughed at Hitler when they could. The girl herself—well, she was a lovely person."

"I understand," she said, and her fingertips touched his hand lightly.

"You've been in love? You are engaged?"

"Oh, no!" She checked herself, surprised and blushing at her indignant denial. "I mean, no, I'm not engaged. I understand how you can feel sympathy for them. Not all of them wanted the war." She laughed casually. "For instance, a few days ago, I had to go to an office of the *Kommandantur*. I was very upset. There was an orderly there—a tall fellow, with a rough but kindly face. He wanted so much to help me, I could see that, and he was trying to speak French. He had the saddest, hungriest, bluest eyes—"

"A blond brute, eh?" Kerner prompted.

"He'd been wounded, hurt; his head was bandaged." She stretched out her slim round arms, locked the fingers in a pretty gesture of helplessness. "I felt like this! I wanted so to tell him I didn't blame him, that I knew he did not want to kill and arrest people. He looked so lonely and lost, so ashamed and hurt, that I—I felt like kissing him to make him feel better—"

"Did you?"

"Of course not. I—I did nothing. I left. He wouldn't have understood."

"I guess not," Kerner laughed. "He made an impression, that chap!"

"Don't be silly! I was sorry for him, he looked like a small boy. Just an ignorant, awkward, stupid private—but so kind."

When he brushed his hair that night, Kerner compared his reflection with that of Franz Haller. He wondered if the time would ever come when he could tell her the truth. He did not despair of this. Like many another man before him, he saw the hand of fate clearly in their meetings. He mentally computed the resources available to him after the war, and wondered that he felt so little doubt that there would be an after-the-war for him.

At the end of her fourth visit, they shook hands on parting, and smiled in silence. Three days later, after a confused conversation carried on with great formality, there was a series of gestures; then they were whispering cheek to cheek, while a great glory descended upon them. . . .

"I don't know what I'll have to offer," he said, in a passionate surge of unworthiness. It was decided that they should keep the engagement secret. Kerner spent the balance of the afternoon grieving over his wasted years and the stupid life he had led until then, when there was so much that was sweet, gentle, beautiful in the world. . . .

"Getting used to waiting, eh?" his host said at dinner.

"Oh, *cette petite Senechal* has been running in here, and they have *un beguin fou*," the woman declared. "So they can stop their dirty war; nobody'll pay much attention to it around here."

Kerner did not like to hear Maryse spoken of as "that little Senechal," nor their love referred to as "a mad crush." But the poor woman was middle-aged, matter-of-fact, and could not be expected to know the difference, he reflected.

Nevertheless, he was worried: Had he really lost the desire to leave? If Monsieur Aristide entered at this moment and said: "Let's go," how would he feel, what would he say? He had to admit that he would not feel as elated as he might have a week before; in fact he knew he would feel very depressed, but he knew also that he would say: "All right."

HE saw Maryse again, an hour before leaving town. The guide who was to accompany him brought her. It seemed she had exacted from Monsieur Aristide a promise that she should be informed. Of course, she had a military pass made out to her, permitting her an emergency visit to a sick aunt, but the trip nevertheless would have in normal times torn a middle-class girl's reputation to tatters. They went alone into the little garden in back of the house, and sat on a bench in the darkness.

"I've had to lie to my father," she wept.

"It's in a good cause, darling."

"But it's so mean—he is such a fine man. I was asking him what he would say if I brought in a fiancé, and he said: 'Any man you loved would be a worthy man, my child.' " She sobbed. "He doesn't know I am deceiving him—he hates deceit. But I don't want to worry him."

"No need to."

Kerner grimaced in the dark. He knew what to think of Senechal, who had talked freely to a German official. But so many people, within his hearing, had done the same. He had seen stacks of anonymous letters on Major Mohring's table. It was part of the ugliness of invasion. Senechal would turn again and be a good Frenchman when the *tirailleurs'* bugles sounded in the streets. One should not be too exacting, at times one must compromise with the devil! If Admiral Darlan had been able to change his skin, after collaborating with the Germans for twenty-nine important months, why prove unrelenting with an obscure small-town *bourgeois* such as Senechal?

Kerner had overheard him by chance; he had no duty so long as the man was not doing further harm. He saw with a certain dismay that he was about to acquire a father-in-law he did not admire or trust, but he knew this was not a rare situation.

At last the man who was to conduct him away called that time was getting short. Maryse clung to him and sobbed. Kerner kissed her repeatedly, caught her wrists and freed himself gently. He surrendered her to the older woman, who was crying in sympathy.

"You'll wait for me, darling?"

"Oh, yes, Charles, oh, yes—"

"She'll wait," the woman said angrily. "Just you come back! Go! Go!"

Kerner and his guide waited on the street, while an endless line of military trucks rolled by. From time to time the man whistled, and at last there was an answer.

They ran after one of the trucks; hands were stretched out to help them aboard—and those hands belonged to Italian infantrymen. They crowded up to make room for the two civilian passengers. Kerner did not know who he was supposed to be, what financial arrangements had been made. He was asked no questions.

The men were rolling to the front; they probably would be in action the next day. But they were young, they had food and bottles of wine. There were long waits, traffic jams, pauses while unidentified motors vibrated overhead. The horizon rumbled and flashed at intervals.

It was still very dark when the trucks halted and the troopers alighted. They adjusted their equipment, took formation and marched away. Kerner's man spoke in Italian with someone; then they followed one of the detachments. Shells flew overhead oftener; there were flickering explosions miles away.

They entered a dark, phantom-like village; the troops kept straight on, while Kerner's companion turned down a side street and knocked on a door, which opened quickly. A kerosene lamp, turned very low, showed a deserted café. Metal urns shone dully behind a small bar. There were tourist-agency posters, advertisements for a bicycle race in Tunis, pinned to the walls. The man in slippers who had let them in brought stale rolls and reheated coffee.

"Any trouble?" he asked.

"No."

"The macaronis are all right. Live and let live." The man lighted an Algerian cigarette, the smoke of which stank in the still, cold air. "We can get you across tonight, if the Americans don't arrive today. It's likely they will. Some of their armored cars came yesterday, but they left."

Kerner was given a cot in a hallway and slept until the clangor of tank combat beyond the village awoke him. He stood in a window and watched part of it—a few lumbering vehicles nosing about cautiously, spitting flame at intervals. Then the owner came up the stairs, called out: "Everybody below for identification."

There were American soldiers in the café, others seated across the street, against the buildings. They were sunburned and dirty, their faces appeared hard and square under the deep helmets. Kerner stood in line with other civilians, passing before a table. He explained his situation to a young captain, who spoke good French.

"Escaped officer?" he repeated Kerner's words casually. "Very well. Over there."

He offered no congratulations. That was evidently a recognized, familiar classification. An hour later, Kerner was questioned in the town hall by other officers, including a French liaison captain. After his identification was made, the questions asked of him were impersonal, concerned with what he had seen while on the enemy's side. His adventures interested no one. They were all at the same time busy and detached.

KERNER reported by nightfall to his battalion, resting in a village thirty kilometers behind the present front. Here again, he was greeted with cordiality, but no surprise.

"We need you," the Major said. "We've had considerable breakage since you left, serving as supporting infantry. How did you get back?" He listened to Kerner's hasty narrative, and nodded. "You'll find things are getting along better now. There was a lot of confusion at the start. For instance, your section was isolated because we had been told there was a battalion ahead of us—"

"I remember that, Major."

"Twenty-three of your men came in that same night; sixteen others straggled back in the next three days. When we recovered the lost ground, we found nine more,

who had hidden in various places. If you deduct also prisoners and wounded, I don't think we lost more than a dozen killed. Sub-lieutenant Granier's missing, but I have hopes—"

"He's dead, Major." Kerner related how his colleague had died.

"I could see he was depressed." The Major nodded. "Recently married, and taken away unexpectedly. Many shared his views. But the spirit is much better—nevertheless, I wish you would make no comment beyond the fact that he was killed. I have forbidden discussion of the political situation. It does no good. What was the sentiment where you were, Kerner?"

"Mostly De Gaulle, Major."

"Naturally. He was the symbol of resistance for two years. I believe— But I can't disregard my own instructions. Glad to have you back. I'll assign you to a company, and your promotion will be confirmed very soon."

CHAPTER FIVE

BEFORE the end of the North African campaign, when the American and British Armies had the Axis forces backing toward Tunis and Bizerte and the issue was no longer in doubt, Kerner's battalion was taken out of the lines and ordered to Algeria, for reorganization and training with new weapons. He obtained leave to stop at Bir-Khassan for a few days.

The weather was warm, the foliage thick on the trees, but nothing seemed changed, except the uniforms of the soldiers. The town had been retaken from the enemy only a fortnight, and now it was German aviators who came over to drop bombs. In a fresh uniform, with his third loop of gold braid on his cuffs—a captain of *tirailleurs* who had seen the enemy retreat at last—Kerner felt very happy, optimistic. It was true that he had not heard from Maryse at all—but mail was uncertain, she had to address his regimental headquarters; the letters might be following him.

Monsieur Aristide recognized him at once as he entered the café of Au Vrai Mazagran, and bustled forward to shake hands. Very soon Kerner suggested that he would like to know the expenses connected with his escape; save for the innkeeper, Kerner knew that he would be interned in Italy.

Aristide shrugged, spread his hands in protest.

"Oh nothing, Captain, nothing! Nice of you to think of it; not many do. The people you lived with would accept no money; I supplied them with extra food for you, of course, but I run a hotel and don't need to profit on that. You can send the lady a little jewel—a brooch or anything—sometime. If you insist, there was one expense: one thousand francs to the fellow who took you away. That includes the fare. Talk of the devil—here he is! —Hello, Marco!"

A slender man in a neat white suit, wearing a scarlet fez on his curly hair, came over to shake hands. Kerner had seen him only as an outline in the night; then for a few minutes in the dim light of the café. He saw now that his guide had an olive complexion, fine teeth, and the keenest eyes in the world.

"The Captain wants to repay me what I gave you," Aristide said. "Remember what it was?"

"*Mille francs, prix d'ami*," Marco said, "a thousand francs, friendly rate. In fact, as I had to give that much to a sergeant, it paid my fare, no more. But for a French officer—"

"How did you arrange it?"

"Oh, I had to visit that village on business; Monsieur Aristide asked me to take you." He shook his head, smiled. "How I arranged it? Every trade has its secrets. But did not everything go smoothly? That's me, Marco:



No fuss, no hiding, no masks, no delay." He waved his slim hands expressively. "If the Captain knows Marseilles, or Toulon, or Nice, ask for Marco in any bar. I'm known. Also in Beyrouth, Tripoli, Alexandria. I know the right people!"

Aristide looked after him when he left, lifted his shoulders. "You have to know all kinds in the hotel business. As you saw yourself, it comes in handy. His nationality? Does he know himself? Tunisian for the moment. Business? Oh, anything profitable, smuggling mostly. Suppose I run out of a certain liquor, and because of the war I can't get it. I get in touch with Marco, and say I need a case of this or that. The case comes. The Germans had not been around three days when he had arranged to get beef from their butchers. He's around now, trying to peddle a lot of American canned goods."

"Never gets into trouble?"

"He says not. But he's often broke, showing he has to bribe himself out. Sometimes, one doesn't see him for a few months." Aristide made the gesture of turning a key in a lock. "But he says he was in America, or Turkey. . . . Another?"

"Yes, thanks. Where does Senechal live?"

"Easy enough to find." Aristide shook his head. "But the girl isn't around. She came in every day, until Marco came back and I told her you were safe; then once or twice after that. Then I heard her father had shipped her to Constantine, to his sister's."

"I should like to see her father."

"Hope you find him in a good mood."

Kerner found the Senechal villa well away from other houses, a large, rather ornate place. He looked about for Maryse—in the garden, in the hall. Senechal received him in a sort of luxurious little office on the ground-floor. To Kerner's surprise, he wore a captain's uniform, with the numeral of a Tunisian cavalry regiment on the collar.

"Captain Kerner? Very happy to know you. Sit down."

Kerner held his kepi on his lap; his heels were together under the chair. He was nervous and it took him two minutes to state the purpose of his visit. Senechal's handsome face did not smile. "Oh, you're the gentleman! I am to understand that you are ready to marry my daughter?"

"Why, yes. Naturally. You see—"

"I see. You are how old? A career officer?" The questions came rapidly. Senechal nodded after a while. "In short, you don't know quite how you will be situated at

the end of the war. May I suggest that we pick up our talk then?" He rose. "Now, I do not wish to add anything disobliging—"

"No one knows how long the war may last, Captain."

"Yet everyone should know a marriage lasts a long time."

"Have I your permission to see Mademoiselle Senechal?"

"She is not in town." Senechal half-turned to take a cigarette from the desk, and lighted it without offering one. "I am a man; I have been young myself. So I do not judge you for taking advantage of a situation. My daughter met you under circumstances that may be romantic, and she is a young girl, generous and thoughtless. I am her father. Because of abnormal conditions, the war, I had to allow her more freedom than was good."

KERNER left, disappointed. But he knew that nine out of ten people would share Senechal's views. Yet the fellow need not have acted so loftily!

"I didn't know Senechal was a captain," he told Aristide at lunch.

"Reserve captain." The innkeeper smiled. "He's not been called yet, but he put on the uniform the moment the Americans marched in."

"I think I'll go to Constantine."

"Why? Because you think Senechal would not forward your mail? Look, I'll get you the address. Better, I'll communicate with a friend, to let her know you're here. I didn't want to talk before you saw Senechal, but now that you see you have nothing to lose, I can ask you a favor—"

"Go ahead."

"You remember how you got to talking with me, about Querlain? Well, the Boches held Querlain in jail for two days, and treated him rather roughly. The third night, he escaped, because he knows that jail. Now, as soon as the gendarmes came back, they started to look for him, and his pal Jules Morel, for what they call 'intelligence with the enemy.' Somebody's told them that Querlain was taken in by the Germans, secretly released. In a word, that he sold out. Now, you were there, heard what Querlain said to that Boche—what's his name, Mohring?—when he thought there were none but Boches around. You're an officer, a captain; they'll hesitate to bother him if they know you'd testify."

"You mean that they'd prosecute him on false charges knowingly?"

"They want to get rid of him, discredit him." Aristide shrugged. "It's his fault, in a way. He's sour, and noses around for stuff about the—well, the rich. Scandals, you know, which the opposition paper uses at election. He's got a good trade, makes a living, and I've told him fifty times to mind his own business. He wouldn't. So some people see a good chance, in all this mess, to have him put in the shade, shipped away."

"He's a Communist?"

"Not even that—just a loud-mouth. Best guy in the world, really, but sore because he's looked down upon for having been in the African Battalions, and in the can. Look at me—I served there too, had a tough boyhood, but I'm an honest trader now and respected, because I didn't get sour."

"You're a philosopher, Aristide."

"If that's the opposite of a sucker, you're right, Captain."

Kerner had to search from bureau to bureau, from gendarmerie to judiciary, before locating the gentleman who could talk to him concerning the Querlain case. He was an assistant prosecuting magistrate, on the civil side, a little chap with a thin nose and gold-rimmed glasses. After exchanging ten words with him, Kerner felt ruffled, irritated.

"I don't believe," he said, "that my concern in Querlain is at all odd, in an Army officer. I happen to have been present at an interview between the suspect and a German military official. I should like my deposition to be taken down by a stenographer, and demand that I be called upon to testify if there is a trial."

"Are you related to Querlain?"

"I have never even spoken to him."

The magistrate called in a stenographer, and Kerner told his story. When the clerk had gone, the "judge" leaned back in his chair and touched the tips of his fingers together. "I believe every word you say, Captain, as a private individual. But in a trial, you'd have to prove that you were there, as a German orderly, and that would be difficult, legally." He thumbed a dossier before him. "You say one thing—three or four persons well known in this town state otherwise: Monsieur Doutons, Monsieur Senechal—"

"Monsieur Senechal?" Kerner was indignant. "Why, he was the man who reported Querlain as a suspect to the Germans! Pointed out him and a friend of his, as ardent De Gaullists."

"You must be mistaken, Captain. Do you know the man?"

"I was speaking to him before lunch, monsieur."

"You were?" The little man blinked rapidly. "And now, you are suggesting that he was informing the Germans. The subject of your conversation with him might throw a light on your motives! Well, your deposition is on file. You will be advised if there is a trial. Good day."

When Kerner told of his interview to Aristide, the innkeeper seemed worried.

"So Doutons is in on it, too? Then there must be the whole lot, the gang that did business with the German purchasing commission since the Armistice! They want to keep Querlain quiet until things are settled. Don't worry, Captain, it won't come to a trial; they'll arrange to have him kept in what's called 'preventive custody.'"

"You mean jail him without motive, legal motive—"

Aristide was not as shocked as the young Alsatian. He explained the political situation. A bloc formed by Doutons, Senechal and others was made up of ex-collaborating Vichyists. They had considered the war as over, had traded actively with Germany, shipped phosphates and foodstuffs. They had many friends among the Government officials, fewer among the local officials, where the De Gaullists had held the majority. The ex-Vichyists were now adjusting themselves, coming over to the National Liberation party, and did not want their former activities publicized. As Aristide put it, they were in a tight spot, had to move carefully, and could not pick and choose their methods.

"They have to defend themselves," he said. "It's their hides at stake."

That night, Kerner saw Senechal at the hotel, in his captain's uniform, dining with other French officers and a couple of Americans. When he saw Kerner, he smiled and bowed courteously, and from time to time after that, his eyes would seek the Alsatian.

AFTER dinner, Kerner, at a loose end, decided to call on the people who had sheltered him. They were delighted to see him, called in neighbors, served wine. His return among them in uniform, after but a few weeks of absence, was a symbol of victory.

Later he walked back to the hotel. The streets were very dark, but there were people going about, sentries, patrols. Suddenly there was a shot, so near that he started sharply. Almost at once the street was filled with soldiers. But the civilians, war-wise and incurious about shootings, kept indoors. Kerner halted in his tracks until the nearest patrol reached him; then he produced



his papers. A young lieutenant, who spoke French, told him a sentry reported having seen the flash, then a glimpse of a man running into an alley, but had not fired for fear of hitting some passer-by. There were a half-dozen such incidents every night; possibly this had been a soldier with too much drink in him.

At the hotel, Kerner was informed that the boss had a message for him; he was in a room across the yard. Kerner recalled that room very well. He found Aristide and three friends playing *belote*. One of the three was Querlain.

"I wouldn't know you," he said, looking at Kerner. "Guess I was excited. Thanks for what you did this afternoon. For an officer, you're a regular guy. Oh, sure, they questioned me, with rubber clubs. But I'm an old hand at that game. They got nothing out of me." He reached out casually toward the kepi Kerner had deposited on a corner of the table. "How did you get that torn?"

"Torn? It's almost new!" Kerner picked up the headgear. There was a tiny tear near the crown, in front, and another in the back. He recalled that he had readjusted the kepi on his head after the shot. Evidently, the bullet had missed his skull by half an inch. "Shows one never can tell," he said. "I had nothing come that close in weeks in the lines. Might have been killed by a stray in this town."

"Not a stray," Aristide said softly, after listening to the explanation. "That was meant for you."

Kerner laughed. "Why? How would anyone know where I was going?"

"Where would you go, except to visit the people you were with?"

"And who knows where I stayed?"

"You'd be surprised how many. I do, my wife does, my kids do. Then there's the little Senechal, and her girl friend, and Marco; and all the others they have told—I bet Marco'll find out for us. . . . By the way, your girl will be here as soon as she can make it."

"You've had news?"

"I'm telling you." He shuffled the cards and looked at Kerner, who nodded and took a chair. He had nothing in particular to do, and he liked these men, with their simple, casual patriotism, devoid of big words and parade. . . .

"One hundred and fifty in nines," Querlain said, holding his head to one side to avoid his cigarette's smoke.

"Trump, trump, and reTrump—watch your ace, my little Captain!—and out she comes—and trump— You may wonder why a big guy like Senechal goes after an old sot like me—my trick, and your deal, Aristide! Well, it's an old story, goes back fifteen years or so— What cards, what cards!"

Kerner listened; the others, who were familiar with the yarn, paid no attention, as the cards were dealt, played, picked up, shuffled. "I'm footloose and fancy-free—out of the jug and just married, but no job. He hires me as foreman in some new affair—those colored rugs. He's bought a shed and put some looms in it, and the native janes come there and work, doing piece-work on his looms, with rental of looms deducted, also damage to wool, damage to material. I get to like one of the dames, and tell her what a sucker she is. She tells the others, and they go on a sort of strike.

"Naturally, in the argument, one of them lets out that I put them wise. They want to work by the hour, with damage and rejects none of their business. Does he fire me? No. He waits for a good chance, and accuses me of stealing. With my record, that looks bad. He doesn't press charges, because he was lying, but that gives me another black mark in town. Then he says around I am an anarchist, getting the natives discontented.

"I always drank a lot; I was born with a slope in my throat. So, when I'm soused, I talk big. The cops start picking me up whenever there's any trouble, saying I made it. Then he goes and gets his wife to see mine, and say what a shame she is married to me. I get drunk and I raise hell around.

"My wife takes the kids and goes to live with her brother, who's a grocer at Bougie. She writes me that I am a no-good, that even Madame Senechal said so. Well, Senechal's thirty-five or thirty-six years old then, and human. He has dough to spend; he goes to Tunis on business twice a month, for three days. . . . I get loaded proper, and I go to Madame Senechal, and say: 'You broke up my home—well, here's news for you!' I thought she'd just raise hell with him awhile.

"But she doesn't; she doesn't get a divorce, either, because of her family. She stays right in the house, and never talks to him. She sends him messages by the maids about what's needed for the house. The kid's sent to a convent in France. In a small town like this, everything gets known. When she dies, twelve years later, she won't see him, and sends him his forgiveness by the priest. I'm sorry I did it, I wouldn't wish that life on a dog—a woman who won't talk to you, yet sticks around. But why had he mixed her up in our affairs in the first place?"

"You denied trumps before," Achille said severely. "It wasn't a nice thing to do, no. Twenty kings—"

"No good; I have aces," Querlain stated. "Now this guy Doutons—"

FIFTEEN years of local intrigues, politics, scandals, poured from his lips. He was a veritable reservoir of gossip. He had probed families to the fourth ancestors, knew of forgotten old-maid aunts who had died in insane asylums, of uncles or brothers who had ended in Guiana. How and where he had found many of the facts he knew could not be imagined. He had a flair for such things, and in other climes might have been a columnist.

"Take the little Senechal, for instance—" he resumed, peering at his cards.

"Play and shut up," Aristide suggested. "We've heard all that before."

Kerner was silent, but felt the blood rush to his head. "There's no harm," Querlain persisted. . . . "Four years ago, old Senechal thought he had that young guy hooked—the fellow from Nice, whose old man owns the

steamship line. But the kid wouldn't play, and bucked Senechal; gentle and quiet, like her mother, but just as set and stubborn."

Kerner felt better. But he had understood, for a flashing second, just how deep a dislike one might take to Monsieur Jean-Baptiste Querlain, free man and patriot-at-large. Conversation, game and wine flowed on. The room became full of smoke. At last Aristide called for a rest, turned out the light and ventilated the place. When the game resumed, Querlain was on another topic.

"You wouldn't think it to look at me, an old souse, but once in a penal camp in the Aures Mountains, I played cards with five other guys. It wasn't *belote* then, it was still *manille*. We were playing to see who'd croak a sergeant. To show you how we hated the guy, the winner was to kill him, even though it meant the firing-squad. We had a sharpened pan-handle for a knife. I lost."

Kerner examined his cards: "What happened to the sergeant?"

"The guy killed him, of course."

"Fifty to the king—spades—and then?"

"Then a lot of us got a swell time out of it—the trial was in Constantine, and we were taken there as witnesses. Regular cells, good clean meals, no work. Turned out the guy who did the job wasn't shot, after all. We told about what the sergeant used to do to us, and he got extenuating circumstances and twenty years' hard."

"They weren't always that easygoing," one of the others put in, breaking a long silence. "In 1911, for one sergeant, they shot three of us. And he was the dirtiest cow of a noncom you've ever seen. For a word, for a look, he'd lash the hell out of you, and dump you naked in a pit for the night—"

"I think," Aristide changed the conversation tactfully, "the Americans will bring a lot of things here to stay."

"Their stuff's good," Querlain agreed. "It isn't finished as well as French material, but it's solid, practical, and does the business. We're too finicky, we Frenchmen; everything must be just so—"

KERNER felt conflicting emotions. These men were honest, according to their standards. And by chance, they had been the ones to help him. He recalled a wise saying of Marshal Lyautey in Morocco: "One doesn't colonize with spotless specimens." These men had sinned, paid for their sins, and worked. Aristide, by real standards, was a gentleman. Their tumultuous past, their experience, had permitted them to do much in an emergency that found ordinary, normal citizens bewildered and helpless. Before the world, Senechal was a better man, because he had hidden his sins better.

How did Kerner know where justice was? He knew that certain men were in league to jail Querlain under trumped-up charges. What he had heard did not alter the present facts, and he felt ashamed of himself for allowing his opinion to be swayed. A few weeks before, he had been happy to accept Aristide's help, to let him hire Marco. . . . When the game ended, Aristide told Querlain: "You better flop here; the cops are looking for you."

"Bah, tonight or tomorrow, what does it matter?" Querlain waved his hands. "It's the jug. And if I get tired of it, I'll beat it for a while."

"I'd like to settle this before I leave," Kerner said.

"How?"

"Simple. Instead of leaving it to the civilians, let's try the Army. I'll put the case before the Intelligence officer here, explain what you did for us before. We'll go and see Senechal, and break the whole thing wide open."

"I wouldn't, Captain," Aristide protested. "Seeing there's the other business—"

"Justice is justice."

"You are young, Captain." Querlain shook his head. "No, don't get yourself into a mess for me. You've done enough. Those civic magistrates have longer arms than you think, and can reach right into the Army."

"We'll see," Kerner snapped.

"You sure will," the glum man concluded.

CHAPTER SIX

IN an office situated in the very building where he had been a German orderly, Kerner had a long interview with Major Thouvenot the following morning. The Major was a large man, slow-moving and calm, with the shrewd, broad face of a Normandy attorney. He nursed his pipe in the palm of his hand, puffed and listened.

"And what do you wish me to do, exactly, Captain?"

"Find some way to safeguard justice, Major."

"Eh-eh!" Thouvenot protested. "That's a large order." He laughed gently. "I believe what you mean is that Querlain must be protected. I am Military Intelligence, while this affair is in the hands of the civilian officials, and that's a first barrier. Another consideration is that we have the Americans and the British here, who do not wish to be involved in our political affairs. I'm not speaking of their politicians and newspapers, but of the military men here. Tunisia is but a springboard for them, and for the next few weeks, they want it as steady as possible."

"Another unfortunate consideration, from your viewpoint at least, is that while Querlain is involved with the civilian officials, the moment I make an official move, the affair becomes a military one, and the military code is rather drastic." Thouvenot cocked his thumb, then dropped it. "Bang, bang! And if that sort of thing once starts, it will be more than one. We are trying, as much as is possible, to avoid a bloody reaction, a Terror of Liberation. We must remember that the means the Germans use are all very well for them, in occupied countries. But let us suppose we round up forty, fifty people in this town who were too helpful to the enemy during his sojourn, shoot them as they perhaps deserve—that will embitter the rest and complicate matters."

The Major indicated a pile of papers: "I have five hundred letters here, some of them signed and giving particulars, naming a thousand people—enough to supply firing-squads with subjects for days."

"Major Mohring had them also," Kerner admitted.

"Doubtless. You believe that all I have to do is to accuse Senechal. I do believe every word you say, Captain. Under martial law, or even on casual interpretation of Article 77 of the Code, he might be shot. So could a dozen others; so could thousands. However, if it comes to a trial, he probably will have an excellent explanation of his conversation with Major Mohring."

"Take a point of law: Tunisia, between the Armistice of 1940 and our return with the Allied Armies, was under the laws of the Metropolis,—of Vichy, if you prefer,—being a Protectorate of the French State. Your protégé Querlain broke the law when he assisted foreign aviators to escape internment. Article 85 says: 'Whoever shall have, by actions not approved by the Government, exposed Frenchmen to reprisals, shall be punished with banishment.' You will find that legally Senechal probably had a right to speak to Mohring as he did, under the then-prevailing rule."

Kerner stared at Thouvenot. He knew the officer to have been an excellent Frenchman, a clever member of the Bureau of Native Affairs in Morocco for years, and in absolute sympathy with resistance to Germany. He tried to restrain a feeling of rage that clouded his mind, made him wish to shout.

"The war will end," the Major resumed; "yes, impossible though it seems, it will end. You know what happened after the last one, which was a successful war, a victorious war. There were revisions of trials—and men who had acted swiftly, under the pressure of war and danger, became unthinking brutes, because they had made mistakes. Even a middle-aged greedy stupid wanton, a confessed spy, Mata Hari, became a sympathetic figure to many. If the forces of National Liberation, coming behind the bayonets and tanks of the Americans, take hasty reprisals, an excellent cause will be smirched before history."

"History," Kerner murmured, with a shrug.

"A big word, eh? But we live by it; we die by it. Political parties in France for the next fifty years will have their roots in the present groups. And we don't want Giraud, for instance, as a name associated with the burning of French towns and the shooting of Frenchmen. Wartime politics, like religion, must profess the remission of sins." Thouvenot slapped the table suddenly. "Of *past* sins! But we are here now, and the first one that budges, I'll undertake to back against a wall—"

Kerner started to rise. "I see, Major, that I—"

"Sit down!" The Major drummed on the table a moment. "I think an interview with Senechal would do no harm. I'll bring some friends. You have Querlain and Jules Morel ready to accompany us."

"Very well, Major." Kerner hesitated, then resumed: "There is a personal feud involved, in which Querlain may not be blameless—"

"I guessed it. Times of war bring such things to the surface, especially in small communities. It's human. You've had an enemy for years, whom you could not touch legally. Opportunity comes to cause him serious trouble by a mere word. The temptation is too strong—and *pouf*, it is done! When, as often happens, the chap is shot, the denouncer feels remorse—but too late."

TO his delighted surprise, Kerner found Maryse waiting for him at the hotel. She introduced him to a middle-aged lady, a cousin of her mother, who would serve as a chaperon.

"I went to see your father, darling. He—"

"He was dreadful, I know." Her round chin and small nose jerked up angrily. "He sent me away after I told him about you. Said you were a fortune-hunter, a homeless, penniless officer. That you—oh, the most horrible things!"

"I can imagine."

"And to me! He had been wrong to trust me, he said, to let me get mixed up in all that foolish agitation. First, he said, it had been 'that lanky ass, De Gaulle,' then you. . . . What are you laughing at?"

"The flattering comparison!"

"He meant excitement about the war, really."

They had sat down in a corner of the old-fashioned lobby, near the slot machine. Their conversation was punctuated by the clicking of coins and the whirring of the mechanism, the laughter of a group of American soldiers.

"Legally, you must go back to him if he insists," Kerner said.

"No. I am more than twenty-one, and can get a court order. I have my own income; my mother arranged that with her attorneys." She looked into space, shrugged prettily. "I see now that she must have had her reasons."

He held her hands, looked down at them. He was touched and pleased to see how white and soft they looked, inside his large tanned scarred paws. The slanting sunlight lighted her round cheek. He had remembered her, and yet he was discovering her again.

"You don't think I am a fortune-hunter, then?"

"If you are, you look for fortunes in strange places, Charles. And what I have isn't worth much effort." She shook her head determinedly. "I won't take a penny from him."

"Where will you stay?"

"Here, until you have to go. Then to Algiers, to live with relatives."

They joined the middle-aged lady and the three had lunch together. Kerner saw that Maryse's companion did not like her rôle, and did not wholly approve of him.

"You're an Alsatian, Captain Kerner?" she asked.

"Almost."

"If the Germans win the war, you will be a German, then?"

"Germany will not win the war, Madame."

"But if she did?"

"There's personal option, Madame."

"You would choose France, I hope, Captain."

Kerner was losing his temper again, but Maryse's hand touched his sleeve.

"After due deliberation, very probably, Madame."

"Because I must tell you, much as I love Maryse, I would never visit her in Germany."

It turned out that the good lady considered Alsatians as not quite French, on probation. Kerner remembered that his mother, in almost every letter, had expressed worry that he might marry an "African." Despite his present elation, he had forebodings that the end of the war might not bring about the end of all strife.

AT two-fifteen, Aristide came to the doorway of the room, nodded. He had agreed to produce Querlain and Jules Morel. Kerner rose.

"I have an appointment this afternoon."

"But you are on leave, Charles," Maryse protested.

"I am. It's something that came up, a routine matter, in connection with my being here during the occupation."

He felt embarrassed at not being frank with Maryse, but the older woman had expressed admiration and sympathy for Senechal several times, stating that a man who succeeded as he had could not be a fool or a knave. Kerner was afraid of comments or protests from her, for she was keenly perceptive.

Major Thouvenot beckoned him across the street, into a large car, and introduced him to two French officers and a lean handsome American, wearing gold leaves on his shoulders. Nothing was said during the brief drive to the Senechal villa, save by the American, who said that the scene reminded him of California.

A smaller car brought the civilians—Querlain, Morel, Aristide. The chauffeurs remained by the grille-work gate, like sentries.

"Remember, *Commandant*," the American put in as they trooped toward the villa, "that I am not officially here—I'm only scenery."

"Impressive scenery, Major!" And Thouvenot addressed the Moorish maid who opened the door: "Monsieur Senechal, at once."

They were ushered into a large parlor with Louis Quinze furniture and many mirrors, two mediocre oil portraits, and mantel ornaments of porcelain statuettes. A clock marked time between two gilded cupids. They heard Senechal's voice upstairs scolding the girl, and her shrill protests that the callers were soldiers. Quick, firm steps came nearer, and the owner entered, buttoning up his tunic. He started perceptibly when he saw eight men waiting for him. His eyes swept to Kerner, to Aristide, to the others.

"To what do I owe this multiple honor?" he asked. His voice had a ring of irony, but he was shaken, worried.

"Captain Senechal, I came to investigate charges made against two local citizens—"

"I know, I know." Senechal stared around haughtily. "Let us go into my office, where we can sit down and smoke." He glared at Querlain, who had lighted a big pipe, and was staring around insolently. He called to the maid to bring in additional chairs. Then he seated himself behind his desk, as if he were presiding. "I am now at your disposal, Major."

"I understand that you were one of the signers of a denunciation of Messieurs Querlain and Morel to the civilian authorities of this town," Thouvenot started. "The Military Intelligence was naturally informed by its own agents. May we learn what motivated your accusation?"

"Not mine alone, Major. Other reputable citizens—"

"Each one in proper turn, Captain. What the others have told us or will tell us, the report will show."

"Whom have you questioned?"

"Does it really matter?" Thouvenot smiled.

"I believe the proper procedure is to summon us at once." Senechal lighted a cigarette. He snuffed out the lighter slowly. "This has a strange resemblance to an investigation of my affairs. Naturally, I resent this domiciliary call in force. The Germans never inflicted it on me."

Thouvenot stirred, as if about to rise.

"I am sorry an attempt at courtesy and an amiable understanding was misunderstood. You are perfectly right, Monsieur Senechal; we are not here officially. If you prefer, we shall take leave of you immediately, and I shall have you called to my office, with a stenographer taking notes, which gives the business an official turn—"

"What is it you wish to know? Let's get it over with now."

"Your reason for stating that Querlain and Morel had served the Germans."

"I did not say they had, but that they might have done so. Querlain was arrested by the German military police; Morel was sought by them. Three days later, both were still at large. And the enemy's patrols were showing an extraordinary flair for concealed goods, cloth, wine, foodstuffs, a knowledge possible only to some one long familiar with the town and vicinity."

"Why pick on Querlain and Morel?"

"Because, through their miscellaneous occupations—carpenter, warehouse watchman, handy-man—over many years, you see—"

"Perfectly. You have no other reason for suspecting them?"

"Their general character: Always ready to get money in any way at all—"

"That's how I got wealthy," Querlain declared, laughing.

"Nothing more? You cannot say that they were seen with the Germans who searched? No? Fin! So all you really have is suspicion."

"And logic. Querlain had an interview with a German officer."

"So did you, Captain Senechal," Thouvenot said. He brought out a notebook, consulted it, gave date and time.

"It's another thing altogether, Major. I am a business man in this town, with interests in various enterprises. I am familiar with labor conditions. I was called in and questioned—pretty stiffly, too—concerning acts of sabotage in warehouses of mine that the German Army had taken over. You will find that a number of men in my position were called in."

"What did you say?"

"That I had no knowledge of any sort to help them."

"What was the German's reaction to that answer?"

"He remained polite. But he told me that I would be held responsible."

"After which, what did you say?"

"What was there to be said? I took leave."

Thouvenot consulted the notebook again. "Your interview with the German Army official—it was a Major Mohring—was entirely unexpected, unsolicited by you?"

"Entirely, Major."

"You had had no communication with Major Mohring before?"

"I might have had. There were a number of forms to fill out, when they first came, checking on raw material, vehicles available, gasoline." Senechal seemed to think a while, then smiled. "In fact, a German car came for me here. When my daughter, who was out on some charity tour, returned, the maid told her I had been arrested, and in alarm, she came to find me. Had I expected the summons, I would have left her word not to worry."

"That's all," Thouvenot said, smiling. He started to rise. Kerner and the civilians exchanged glances; Querlain seemed in the clear, but they had expected much more. Senechal rose also, prepared to shake hands. The Major sat down again: "Oh, one more question, if you don't mind—"

"Not at all, not at all!" Senechal settled back. Suddenly he handed out the box of cigarettes. "Forgive me, I was a bit startled and forgot I was host. Major, Major, Captain, Captain Kerner—" There was a murmur of polite acceptance or refusal. "And now, Major?"

"Did you inform Major Mohring that Querlain and Morel were ardent De Gaullists? That they had assisted in the escape of interned British aviators?"

"British aviators?"

"And were probably mixed up with sabotage?"

"I did not."

"You are quite sure that you did not inadvertently drop a word too much about them during your interview with Major Mohring?" Thouvenot gestured. "You see, Querlain was arrested in his shop ten or fifteen minutes after your interview. Knowing on what slight suspicion you reported him to the French authorities—"

"But Doutons and others signed, too. They had interviews with the German officials. What one says to French authorities is one thing—to the German, another!"

"Really?"

"I deny you the right to doubt my word, Major."

"You can deny me the right as an individual, Captain Senechal. But in the discharge of my duties, you cannot deny me anything." Major Thouvenot held up one finger: "First, a word of warning. Yes, warning. I have communicated with the British authorities, and they will confirm that Morel did some tasks for them between December, 1940, and February, 1943, for which he received no pay. That Querlain assisted him on occasion."

YOU confirm that they were spies, Major," Senechal asserted. "And spies ordinarily work for both sides. That is well known."

"Not Morel's type of spy, Captain Senechal. Not Querlain."

"I deny making any statement disloyal to France or good Frenchmen, Major."

"Do you, or rather, *did* you, include Morel and Querlain among good Frenchmen?"

"I knew them to have jail records, Major."

"I am not speaking of their civic virtues, but of their patriotism."

"I have known Querlain to be an anti-militarist; I have heard him called a Communist. At this moment, I'll guarantee that he is against the temporary Government—"

"Right. I'm for De Gaulle, until the Boches are across the Rhine," Querlain cried, rising. "After that, we'll see!" Aristide and Morel hauled him down on his chair again, despite his protest: "Because we're in a swell dump, with perfumed cigarettes, I'm supposed to shut up?"



"You see the type?" Senechal inquired, with well-bred weariness.

"I envy him the privilege of shouting what he pleases!" The Major resumed: "You deny having mentioned these men's activities to the German officer, Mohring?"

"Absolutely."

"Captain Kerner—no, don't rise, keep your seat. Captain Kerner, do you maintain that you heard this gentleman reveal to Major Mohring, officer in the German Army of Occupation in Tunisia, that Querlain and Morel had been active for Britain in this region, and that they must be implicated in sabotage?"

"I did not hear the names mentioned, but—"

"Just a moment." Senechal was flushing. "To start with, I was alone with Major Mohring, and this man is not Major Mohring. Then, yesterday, Captain Kerner was with me in this very room. He was asking my permission to marry my daughter. I informed him, as tactfully as I could, that his standing did not warrant my permission—"

"Is that true, Captain Kerner?"

"It is. But—"

"I made it plain that I considered it ungentlemanly on his part to have taken advantage of the sympathy inspired in a young inexperienced girl, by his position as a fugitive soldier of France. I see that I was right, as he seems to have decided upon some sort of petty revenge, by testifying to something he knows nothing about. Probably, had I given my consent, he would not be here now."

"It would have made no difference, Captain Senechal."

Major Thouvenot was shaking his head doubtfully. It was the American Major who spoke, in drawling, accented French: "The Captain will tell his story, and afterward, we hold the argument about the marriage."

"Wisdom itself, Major. Go on, Captain Kerner."

"I ask you all to leave," Senechal said. "I have tolerated this long enough."

"Then I shall have the regret to post sentries around your villa," Thouvenot said, "to prevent your communicating with possible witnesses before the official investigation. You will not be permitted to write or telephone."

"That is arrest, Major."

"Sentries, no communications with the outside." The Major nodded. "Yes, that is what it would be. We have the alternative of finishing now—"

"Very well."

The door opened, after a discreet knock, the Moorish girl appeared: "M'sieu, Mademoiselle is here with Madame Coulevant."

"Later, later—leave us alone!"

"I did not hear the names mentioned," Kerner resumed. "But Captain Senechal (then not in uniform) mentioned two men as mixed up in the escape of British officers and sabotage since the German occupation of the town. Major Mohring then had patrols pick up two men. Only one was found, brought in. He was Querlain. Major Mohring's questions showed he was acting on recent information."

"You heard me?" Senechal glowered. "Where were you?"

"I was the orderly in the antechamber."

"Relate how you happened to be," said Thouvenot.

"CAN you prove it?" one of the French captains asked, when Kerner finished. "Frankly, it's extraordinary. A knowledge of German sufficient to—"

"Not an ordinary war," the American put in. "I was born in Ohio, in America; I am here in Tunisia; I speak French slowly, but German very well."

"Monsieur Aristide will attest that I came to him wearing German uniform. That I was with a group of cooks, orderlies from the officers' mess across the street."

"But how did you happen to be in the antechamber?" the Captain insisted. "I am not doubting you, Captain Kerner, but in justice to this gentleman, who is too angry to ask clear questions—"

"I was assigned there."

"Do you remember him as the orderly, Querlain?" Thouvenot asked.

"Well—" Querlain stooped forward, peered at Kerner. "I could say yes, sure. But a guy who's been in the jug as much as I have has to be twice honest. The guys who took me in had shaken me up; I had no time to look around. I remember there was one Boche with a bandage around his head, standing just inside the door. But to swear that I remember his face and that it's the Captain's mug, that I can't do."

"I had a bandage around my head, and tape over one eye," Kerner said. "The scars are still there." He looked at Senechal: "You may not admit it, but I'll prove to you, personally, that I was there. Your daughter came to look for you. I knocked on the door, and you came out with Major Mohring. You introduced your daughter. You reassured her. She left. Major Mohring did not close the door—and I overheard some of your conversation."

Senechal smiled: "I have said already that my daughter came to speak to me. Major,"—he glanced at Thouvenot—"did he mention this incident before?"

"I didn't want to involve Miss Senechal," Kerner said.

"But you do not mind placing her father under suspicion, do you?"

"I don't wish to see men who befriended me falsely accused."

"And a sentence against me, which would turn my property over to my daughter, who is infatuated with you, would not be against your ethics. A man who will take advantage of a young girl's generous excitement at this time—well—"

The American spoke again: "We are far from our business."

"Eh!" Thouvenot gestured mildly. "I did not know the possibility of complex motives. It comes down to a question of delicate judgment: Captain Kerner states Captain Senechal said something, which Captain Senechal denies saying."

"Even more remote, Major." Senechal smiled. "When my daughter spoke of you to me, Captain Kerner, she said she had fallen in love with you for the usual reasons:

handsomeness—women differ in such standards—kindliness, pathos. She described you in an old civilian suit, too short at the sleeves. Somehow, protruding wrists made you irresistible. Yet but a few days before, two or three, she had spoken with you in the anteroom."

"To an orderly, in German uniform."

"Did you identify yourself to her later as that orderly?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, at first, because Monsieur Aristide had warned me against telling anyone. Then, because of—well, embarrassment, having appeared loutish, clumsy."

"Did she, at any time, mention going to the *Kommandantur*?"

"Yes."

"So you could make up your story perfectly—the story you told a civilian magistrate yesterday, and Major Thouvenot today, after I had refused."

"I told Monsieur Aristide of your conversation the same evening."

"That is true," Aristide said.

"Monsieur Aristide is an old comrade of Querlain in the penal battalions. I esteem him for having redeemed himself. Nevertheless, it's regrettable that you have on your side witnesses whose testimony could be discounted. I do not deny having spoken with Major Mohring, but I do deny that I said anything harmful to any individual, to any Frenchman. And I do not believe that you were the orderly, or in a position to overhear. You admit having been a waiter in the mess. Is it likely that Major Mohring would not have found a valid man among his own people?"

"There had been drafts for front service," Kerner said: "German replacements in this region already suffered because no reinforcements reached Tunisia from Sicily."

The American stifled a yawn, moved his index finger significantly in a circle.

"Well, gentlemen, we must—" Thouvenot started.

"I have here a note from my daughter," Senechal resumed. "She is separating from me because I disapprove of her choice. She is in a state probably known to those of you who have daughters. A father doesn't count. Call her in, and ask her. The eyes of love, you know."

"There is no need to submit Miss Senechal to—" Kerner protested.

"In the interests of justice," Senechal smiled.

MARYSE was called, and halted short when she saw the odd gathering in her father's office. She smiled at Kerner, looked about questioningly.

"These gentlemen have a few questions to ask of you, dear," Senechal said. "Answer them."

"Why, yes. Is there any trouble, Charles?"

"Just a moment, Captain Kerner," Thouvenot snapped. "Miss Senechal, when did you first meet—no, first see—Captain Kerner?"

"At Mathilde's—that's the woman who used to work for my mother before she married. Monsieur Aristide had sent word he needed photographs taken. A friend of mine had a good camera."

"We know all that, miss. Captain Kerner was there?"

"Yes. Mathilde called him from another room."

"You had never seen him before?"

"No." Maryse looked around, puzzled. "No, why?"

"You'd remember if you had?"

"Of course. I mean—of course." She smiled and blushed.

"You remember going to find your father in a German house?"

"Yes. I had come home—"

"We know that. Whom did you speak to there?"

"Well, a young sergeant in the hallway, at a table. He spoke a little French. Then he called another soldier,

a corporal, I think. This one argued more, but took me along the hall and knocked on a door. A private soldier opened—and he knocked on the inside door, and my father and—”

“The orderly, inside the first door, do you remember him?”

“Yes, very well.” Maryse smiled and looked sweetly at Kerner, who grew hopeful.

“You’d know him again? What did he look like?”

“He had a bandage around his head, with that little cap over it.” She was amused, and Kerner realized that she recalled their conversation at Mathilde’s house. “A big man, with a red, tanned face, and blotches on the cheeks. He looked very gloomy.”

“You’d know him again?”

“Oh, anywhere.”

“It was not Captain Kerner?”

“Captain Kerner? Charles?” She giggled and shook her head mischievously: “No, no.”

“Just a moment, Captain Senechal,” Thouvenot warned. “Miss, this is very serious: Captain Kerner is definitely not the same man as the orderly we mention?”

The tone took her aback; she stopped laughing.

“No.”

“You may leave us, Miss.”

Kerner rose. “Just a moment.”

“You wish to convince my daughter it is your wish to be recognized?”

“I’ll leave no doubt in her mind,” Kerner declared. He leaned toward the Major, took the notebook, scribbled a few words on a page, returned it. “Maryse—Miss Senechal, come here. We spoke about the orderly before, remember? You remembered him. You said he had sad blue eyes—”

“Yes.”

“You told me you wished to do something to cheer him up, even if he was a Boche—”

“Yes.” She nodded several times; looked at him pleadingly.

“But you did not tell me what you did.”

“I—I didn’t do anything.”

“Yes, you did.”

“I didn’t, oh, no—” She looked up at him. “He had eyes like yours.” And Senechal chuckled audibly. “He was sad. I—yes, I remember now, I wanted to do something for him. He had been kind. I—I gave him some money—”

“How much?”

“Twenty francs.”

Major Thouvenot stretched out his arm, handing the notebook to the American officer. “Twenty francs, right!”

Back at the hotel, Monsieur Aristide led the party into his most beautiful private room and called for champagne.

“Did you see him deflate—eh, did you?” Querlain asked repeatedly.

“Well,” Morel said sagely, “a man doesn’t like to be proved a liar, even in a small matter—a proud guy like Senechal, especially.”

THOUVENOT and his colleagues drank standing, left soon. Kerner escorted them to the door, thanked the Major. He explained that he did not wish to leave, as he expected Miss Senechal to return.

“Glad to have been of help. Unpleasant task, but needed.”

Yes, Kerner admitted, the end of the interview had been unpleasant. Senechal had tried to bluff it out, but felt that the listeners were convinced. He had grown very white when the Major had advised him to take off his uniform and devote himself to commerce. He understood that although the matter would be kept confidential, Thouvenot would make out a report. Then,

upon a suggestion from the Intelligence officer, he had telephoned to the prosecuting magistrate and withdrawn his signature from the list of accusers. . . .

On the way back, Thouvenot had pointed out that he—Thouvenot—was in an odd situation concerning Senechal, and had had to let him go with his humiliation and a warning. Before a military court-martial, he would have deserved the firing-squad, as he had endangered agents of the Allies, and given information to the enemy. All agreed that would have been somewhat drastic. Sending him before a civilian jury, in the present situation, would have led to a bitter controversy—the facts would have been lost sight of; it would have been a political battle.

He shrugged at the suggestion that Senechal might shoot himself. “Nonsense! A man has a sense of honor, or he hasn’t. His evasions, his small lies, were worse than his original slip. He has a poor little soul, incapable of a tragic gesture.”

“Captain Kerner,” he said in parting, “if anything happens, do not try to stay in this town, trying to patch things up. Join your battalion at once, throw yourself into your work, get back into the lines. Believe me, action is the best cure for certain ailments.”

“What could happen?” Kerner laughed.

“Eh?” Thouvenot looked at him a moment, then said: “One never knows.”

KERNER was puzzled by the Major’s last advice. He had told him nothing of the attempt to shoot him the preceding evening,—if it had been an attempt,—for it sounded melodramatic. He reasoned that he had nothing to fear. Senechal might want revenge, but the others would prevent anything he suggested. They had no personal animosity against Kerner.

He cut short Querlain’s effusions, went up to his room, to change into a fresh white uniform. He was planning on some method to ditch the aunt, Madame Coulevant, to be alone with Maryse. The poor kid must be all broken up by finding out that while she ran about doing what she could for the cause, her father had been working for his own ends.

He walked up and down the stairs, and paced the lobby, growing more and more restless. He knew that Maryse and her chaperon had much to talk over with Senechal, business details to attend to. Family finances were always involved. He wished that he could be in a position to say: “Maryse, don’t argue, just leave. I have enough.” But he had nothing but his captain’s pay, could not ask for funds from home—and if he knew women like the Coulevant dame, an offer of support before marriage would cause shock and repudiation.

As night fell, his worry increased. Senechal had been desperate. Suppose he had decided to make an end of it—and taken Maryse along? Kerner pictured her, lifeless and bloody, on the floor of the parlor. . . .

The first alert of the evening sounded, but the guns did not open fire, so it must be false. But the streets were unsafe; patrols fired recklessly. The dining-room was emptying. The bar was crowded with men in khaki.

He went to speak to the girl behind the counter, who was adding figures in a book and laughing at the young soldiers around her.

“Did anyone telephone for me—for Captain Kerner?”

“No, Captain. What’s your room number?”

“Twenty-six, miss.”

“Twenty-six.” She turned, scanned the pigeonholes. “Ah, I thought I remembered. Captain Kerner, Charles—a letter for you.”

“Thanks.” He walked away, holding the envelope in his hands. Who would write him? He did not even care. But he looked at the address before shoving the letter into a pocket, and saw there was no stamp. *Mon-*

sieur le capitaine Charles Kerner, *Au Vrai Mazagran, en ville*. He opened it, read the signature: *Marie-Louise Senechal*. The message was only two lines:

"Monsieur: For motives that you will readily understand I have lost all desire to see you."

He read this ten times, twenty times—still he did not understand. What motives? What had he done? Surely she did not blame him for helping Querlain. These were not normal times; she had admitted her father was in the wrong. He went out into the street, hatless, and headed for the villa. He stumbled along the dark avenues, halting automatically at challenges. She had lost all desire to see him—what a fine thing to say! He had come here to see her; she had come back to see him; now she had lost all desire—it made no sense!

An Arab watchman opened the iron grille for him, recognizing the uniform. Kerner shoved a bill in his hand, ran to the villa, rang the bell. The maid opened the door, started to close it. He pushed, she pushed, he won.

"Mr. Senechal is not at home."

"I want to see Miss Senechal. Tell her Captain Kerner must speak to her."

He was in the small hall, at the bottom of the stairs. He spoke loudly, wishing to be heard. In a minute, Madame Coulevant appeared. She stood on the last step and looked at him, with no kindness in her small eyes.

"Mabrouka, call in the watchman," she said.

The Moorish girl giggled. "He left as soon as he let the gentleman in. He has permission for a night off from Mr. Senechal."

"I merely wish to speak to Maryse for a minute, Madame," Kerner said humbly, looking as meek as he could. "She doesn't want to speak to you."

"I must—"

"You must! Haven't you done enough to the poor child? Made a fool of her—humiliated her before a crowd!" She took a deep breath and exploded: "The moment I saw you, I knew you were no gentleman. I knew you'd break her heart. An Alsatian, eh? I know them, the Alsations. My sister married one."

"Madame Coulevant, I intend to see Maryse."

"And I say you won't. You come forward and, captain or not, I lay my hand across your beak. Mabrouka, call the police, the police—"

Kerner backed away to still the shrill outcry. He knew that if Maryse was anywhere in the house she was aware of his presence. He dreaded a scuffle with this middle-aged woman. Three men could not have stopped him, but she could.

"Maryse," he called, "Maryse, please—"

ON the steps Madame Coulevant stood ready and truculent, hunched like a football guard before the goal. He felt baffled and ridiculous.

"She won't come," the maid said suddenly. "She's stubborn, like her mother."

Kerner felt despair. Her mother had retained her official status as mistress of the house, wife in seeming, for ten years or more, without speaking to her husband. If there was anything in heredity, he was up against determination of the hardest kind.

"Madame, if you have a son—"

"I have two sons. So what?"

"Poor fellows!" Kerner sighed, discouraged. Even an appeal in their name would be in vain. "Are you going to ask her to come down, or not?"

"Keep away, keep away! Police, *po-leece!*"

He abandoned the field, went out, the maid shuffling after him to close the outer gate. He walked at random through the dark streets. There were fewer and fewer people about.

Kerner recalled that Thouvenot had foreseen something of this sort, so it must be the consequence of some action of his. But what? He had not asked the girl to come as a witness, in fact he had done his best to keep her out of the mess. Probably it would be best to follow the advice given, to get out of town immediately—tonight, somehow. He could write her; perhaps she would answer. But he knew better—she was stubborn.

He no longer wished to win her, to marry her; no, he wanted to tell her what he thought of her scornful conduct. He did not have to tolerate that sort of treatment! He could be stubborn too, for he was part Alsatian, and all Alsations are stubborn; he was part Lorrainer, and all Lorrainers are keen and persistent. She would have to see him, to listen to him. He had four days to work in. He would wait all day outside that villa. . . .

He dodged a big truck, the first of many chugging down the avenue. As he reached the sidewalk, a door opened, and he saw the lighted interior of a small grocery-bar. As he walked in, conversation paused. The customers, most of them American soldiers, looked at him curiously. He ate some bread with vague rubbery meat, drank acrid wine. He was surprised that he enjoyed this frugal meal; then he recalled that he had no dinner. The American soldiers shot side glances at him. Probably because he wore no kepi.

FINALLY one of them, the equivalent of a sergeant-chief, came to Kerner. This was a big broad chap with small eyes, a little flat nose and a big jaw.

"Know any English?" he asked.

"Yes, a little, Sergeant."

"You're a captain, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am captain." Kerner thought he understood.

"I have my papers—"

"No." The American shook his head. "That's all right. You don't feel so good?"

"You want to say am I ill?" Kerner grew a little distant.

The other rested an elbow on the zinc counter, puffed at a cigarette, resumed after a long pause: "We're too big to sock them, so we get kicked around. You just had a fight with your girl. You got sore and you walked out—left your cap." The sergeant made smoke circles. "Know what that means? Unconsciouslike, you wanted an excuse to go back and make up."

"Ah?" Kerner paid his bill, and turned to go.

"Look, Captain," the other said, "is it all right if I buy you a drink? I mean, you're a Frenchman, I'm an American, see? I've been through it, lots of times. If you go back now, feeling sore, you just start again. You want to give her time to worry."

Kerner accepted the drink. He liked the big man; he was touched and a little amused. He knew the type, which is international, the Good Samaritan, the chap who believes he has a knack for settling problems. He found the effort of speaking English, the attention he must give to understand or guess the idioms, was pleasant at this moment. It seemed to ease his thinking.

The sergeant, whose name was Ed, told him a long, involved yarn about his own wife. He was married, had two kids. Just the same, he said, he and his wife still fought. Did Kerner understand? "You love a dame, you want her to be perfect, just like you think her—but she isn't, and you tell her." Ed said he supposed a woman felt the same way about any guy she was crazy about.

According to good manners, Kerner had to buy another drink. And to his own astonishment, he found himself telling much of his story to Ed! That he was not married, that he was engaged, that there was a misunderstanding. Nothing personal, a family matter. . . .

"You don't get along with her folks," Ed analyzed. "I don't, either."

"I was not permit' to see she," Kerner warmed up. "Somewhat words, and we would to understand." Ed carefully straightened his English, nodding. Some of his friends had ceased talking, and listened too—quietly, sympathetically. It was an old, old story of a much older war than the one they were now winning.

"Where does she live?" Sergeant Ed asked.

Kerner hesitated, trapped. It was not quite the thing to do—he, a French captain, to discuss a young girl with men of a foreign army. But he could not lie, he would have to show himself in the vicinity tomorrow, the day after. It was too late, he had talked too much. Why worry? These men were transients, like himself, would be leaving soon, for the North. He answered.

"I know the place," a corporal said from a table. "There's a big brass name plate on the gate: *Gaston Senechal, Négociant*. That means wholesaler, don't it?"

"Trader, merchant, yes."

"They got an Arab girl there; she's nuts about soap and corned beef. I was shooting the bull to her about buying her a phonograph." This brought about delicate soldierly criticism and comments. "There's a French jane there, all right, but she must have just come back. Brooks, the Arab jane, said she was away."

"Know where the French one bunks?" Ed asked.

"Yea. The old man's out of the way, in the front. But the girl's room is right over the kitchen, with a terrace above where Brooks flops."

"If a guy got over the outside wall, he could maybe climb to that terrace?"

"Easiest thing in the world." The corporal, whose name was Tony, had an eye and a memory for terrain and obstacles. "You don't need no climb for the wall. You just reach through the bars of the grille-gate, using a stick or a hook, pull a bar out of a socket. Then you work the thing back and forth, and the lock springs open. There's an Arab guy supposed to watch, but he sleeps so sound you could burn his toes with matches. No dog—Brooks says the old man don't like dogs."

Much of this had to be repeated in ordinary words to Kerner, with gestures, for instance to explain a hook. He looked from face to face, and they all appeared to think it would be proper for him to obtain an interview by guile, since honesty had failed.

Kerner had doubts. Of course, he did not risk much; in times of war, an officer is not kept away from the front for a private lapse. But if the police came, and he was arrested, he would be ridiculous.

"The police?" Ed was amused. "Listen, Cap, we go with you; we're a patrol, see? I'll stay at the gate with a couple of guys, and keep the cops arguing if there's a bust-up. Anyway, they won't show up for fifteen minutes. It's up to you to get in quietly. Make sure the girl knows it's you before she can yell. She won't; she'll try to get you to leave quiet."

"And if one officer make a round?"

"We tell him there's a French captain inside, asked us to watch while he investigates something. He'll wait for you, you tell him your story, and the two of you have a drink. Everything will be O. K."

MEANWHILE, those present had a drink, another. It was after midnight when they started, six men and a sergeant, carrying rifles, walking in step. They reached the Senechal villa without incident. Tony, the expert, opened the gate in five seconds. He escorted Kerner across the lawns, showed him the terrace. Kerner removed his tunic, his boots, handed them to Tony. There was no moon, but the stars supplied dim light.

Scaling was easy for a strong, agile man, using the clamps of a tin drain. One, two holds, and his hand was on the stone balustrade of the terrace; another effort, and he vaulted onto the tiles.

After taking a few deep breaths, he tiptoed across to the French windows of the room. There he came to a quick stop. Someone was snoring inside—not light, dainty snores such as he might have credited to Maryse, but deep, serious, businesslike snorts and gasps, with whistling effects. He did not need to be told who was snoring. Madame Coulevant's snores were as personal as her voice.

He should have thought of her! The question remained whether Maryse was in the same room or in another. The safe course was to retreat, to abandon the attempt. Senechal had probably returned, and if there were an outcry, he would not hesitate to charge Kerner with trespassing, or attempted burglary. There might be shooting, for although the Germans had seized fire-arms during their occupation, Senechal was likely to have hidden a gun somewhere.

For long minutes he stood by the window, reluctant to leave. Save for the snores, he could discern no sounds. Then something moved, so near him that he had barely time to step aside, to flatten against the brick wall. The window opened wider, with a slight creaking, and a silhouette emerged from the darkness.

THE ghostly shape crossed the terrace slowly, noiselessly. It stopped at the balustrade. The white garment, nightgown or negligee, seemed to grow luminous with time. Kerner's heart pounded; he knew it was Maryse; but if she saw him, she might scream.

She looked into the sky, and he could hear soft weeping. This melted his resentment completely. The poor kid, broken-hearted! Suddenly, she slumped to her knees, rested her head on her arms upon the balustrade, and sobbed. Kerner crept toward her, his stockinged feet making no sound. He disliked to frighten her, but he must talk to her.

Yet she must not cry out, or he could never explain.

He sprang forward, his right hand clamped over her mouth, pulling her head up and back. His left arm circled her arms and her body. He swung her about, sat on the balustrade, held her helpless between his knees.

"Don't be afraid; this is Charles—me!"

She struggled for a moment longer, then relaxed, so completely that he thought at first she had fainted. That would be a wonderful situation! He could do nothing to revive her, to attract attention. He might have to leave her here on the terrace, dressed in little better than nothing. But she moved her head from side to side, tried to free herself—no longer in panic, but in anger. He could feel the fury in her.

"Darling, promise not to call and I'll let go."

She shook her head; she would not promise. He pleaded with her gently for a while. Then he grew angry himself. Each time he asked her to promise to be still, she shook her head. He was in a cramped position; he was afraid to hold her too tightly, afraid to give her a chance to tear free. Her imagined cries for help, the old woman's shrill screams, rang through his brain in advance.

Why the devil had he listened to that big fool of a sergeant?

His patience broke sharply; as well to get it over with! He stood up, dragging her erect. "All right, yell, you little fool!" And he let her go. He was braced for the worst, and her behavior shocked him.

"You cut my lips," she whispered. "Now, be satisfied with that and go away."

"I want an explanation, Maryse."

"I owe you no explanation, Captain Kerner. I take pity on you, but don't presume too much on my patience. Go."

"First, tell me what I did!"

"You tricked me into testifying against my father."

"He sent for you. I didn't want you brought in."
"And you made it plain I had—had looked twice at that orderly—"

"Why not? Since I was the orderly."

"You imbecile, you fool!" Her fierce whisper pealed in Kerner's brain like thunderclaps. "I never was so humiliated!" She quoted him: "You said he had sad blue eyes—oh, go, will you, go—"

"All right, I shouldn't have said it. I beg your pardon. I'll go. May I write you? Will you answer?"

"I never want to hear from you again, never want to see you!" She whispered on: "My father is ruined here. He'll have to leave. They, Doutons and the rest, they told him last night he must not—must not involve them."

"He deserved it."

"But you shouldn't be the one to cause it! Don't you see?"

"No, I don't. There's no such thing as family in war. It's too big, too important, too many people mixed up."

"No family? Then why would you want a wife?"

"That's quite different, it's—" His voice broke.

"You should listen to yourself!"

They froze as a sleepy voice called out: "Maryse?"

"I'm here, Auntie, on the terrace. Don't worry."

"Have you got anything on?"

"Yes, Auntie."

There was a pause; then a prolonged, whistling prelude. Madame Coulevant was asleep again. Kerner was shaken at having heard Maryse speak in a perfectly controlled, normal voice.

"You must go."

"Tell me you'll write."

"I'll return your letters unopened."

"Then it's good-by?"

"It's farewell, Captain Kerner."

"May I kiss you, Maryse, for old times?"

"If you'll promise to go—"

"Oh, I'll go without a bribe!" Kerner said curtly.

HE vaulted the balustrade without another word, so hastily that he missed the first clamp with his foot and slid down with a thump. He picked himself up, and an indistinct form emerged from the dusk.

"How did you make out?" Tony asked.

"I fell," Kerner replied, in English.

"I mean, everything all right? I could hear you whispering."

"Everything go for the best, thank you."

"You're lucky. I couldn't get a rise out of Brooks—she's dead, or she's out." There was a third possibility which neither dwelt upon. "Look, you can put on your stuff outside. Let's get going. There's a lot of moving around in back of the house—sounds funny to me."

They rounded the corner of the villa, cut across the lawns.

Then, very near by, there was a challenge, in English. Tony pulled Kerner down; and just in time, for flashes darted from different directions, detonations split the night, men called, dogs barked. Kerner and his guide scurried too, for the gate.

"It's me, it's me!" Tony announced.

They were outside, among a crowd of soldiers. A light flashed in Kerner's face. "And who's this one?"

"He's all right, Captain. I know him."

"Who fired that revolver?"

"Not us," Tony assured the speaker.

"Hey, here's somebody!" a voice called, thirty yards away.

That shifted the center of interest. The torch revealed two men, in German uniforms, standing against the wall, their hands held high, palms out. One was a captain, the other a noncom.

"We are your prisoners," the officer said.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Ed replied. "Where are the others?"

"The guide? He ran when you fired."

"Didn't go far," another noncom said casually, coming up with his semi-automatic rifle in the crook of his arm. "He's over there, stiff as a mackerel."

A moment later the torch was on again and Kerner, over the shoulders of the Americans, looked down into the placid waxen face of Marco—the man was the victim of his chosen profession. The rumbling of trucks along a near-by street gave Kerner a clue to the situation: Marco's information and timing had been correct, as always. But the presence of Kerner's volunteer guards at the gate had tripped him up, fatally.

"How much did he ask you?" Kerner asked the officer, in German.

"Five thousand in advance—twenty-five hundred when clear."

For some dim reason, Kerner felt better: Marco had not lied to him, had made him a special rate. There were French cops around now, cars halting by the roadside. Tony came up out of a group, and handed Kerner his tunic and boots.

"Stick around, Cap. They want to talk to you."

"All right." Kerner sat down to pull on the boots. He had one of them on when a weeping voice he knew caused him to rise. Maryse was pushing her way through the soldiers, to look at Marco. Kerner hopped to her, caught her shoulders: "Don't look at that. He's dead."

She turned, threw herself upon him, kissed him wildly.

"Oh, Charles! Thank God! I thought they—they—"

"Would it have mattered so much?"

"Oh, Charles! Oh, darling!"

They drew aside, in the shadow of the wall. Odd thoughts occurred to Kerner: That this was something that Major Thouvenot had not foreseen. That he should question Maryse to find out why, when she had believed him dead, it had revived the love he had lost forever, if alive! He decided against this for the moment, and freed himself long enough to pull on the other boot.

"I'll have to speak with the officer in charge, as soon as he has time," he told her between kisses. He was not finding the delay unendurable. "Then we can have a long talk. I am sorry I frightened you so, on the terrace—"

"I knew you were there."

"You knew I—"

"I couldn't sleep, and I saw you at the window. I knew it was you."

He was half-laughing, half-angry.

"And, Charles, darling—"

"Yes, Maryse?"

"You know—you—the orderly? I knew all the time."

"You did? Then why—"

"I was silly. I wanted to tease you sometime about having bought you for twenty francs. Then, when you didn't say anything, I got to thinking it was a secret, that you didn't want anybody to know." She caressed his face with her hands. "When I saw my father look so pleased, I thought he wanted you to have been the orderly, so I thought it wouldn't be good for you. So I lied, until you—you know—you tricked me."

"You had an idea I might be—"

"No, yes—oh, do I even know *what* I thought? All I knew was that I was crazy about you, and nothing must happen to you." She paused. "See, I tell you everything now. I'll never tell lies again! They make trouble."

"Oftener than not," Kerner admitted.

"Do you love me, Charles?"

"Uh-huh. Do you?"

"Yes."

Kerner held her close, and laughed.

"I'd like that in writing!" he said.



Never mind "who done it"—pitch in and help get it down!

THIS IS YOUR UNCLE SAM talking—but I'm going to talk to you like a DUTCH uncle, to keep all of us from going broke.

Ever since the Axis hauled off and hit us when we weren't looking, prices have been nudging upwards. Not rising awfully fast, but RISING.

Most folks, having an average share of common sense, know rising prices are BAD for them and BAD for the country. So there's been a lot of finger pointing and hollering for the OTHER FELLOW to do something—QUICK.

The government's been yelled at, too. "DOGGONNIT," folks have said, "WHY doesn't the government keep prices down?"

Well, the government's done a lot. That's what price ceilings and wage controls are for—to keep prices down. Rationing helps, too.

But let me tell you this—we're *never* going to keep prices down just by leaning on the government and yelling for

the OTHER FELLOW to mend his ways.

We've ALL got to help—EVERY LAST ONE OF US:

Sit down for a minute and think things over. Why are most people making more money today? It's because of the SAME cussed war that's killing and maiming some of the finest young folks this country ever produced.

So if anyone uses his extra money to buy things he's in no particular need of . . . if he bids against his neighbor for stuff that's hard to get and pushes prices up . . . well, sir, he's a WAR PROFITEER. That's an ugly name—but there's just no other name for it.

Now, if I know Americans, we're not going to do that kind of thing, once we've got our FACTS straight.

All right, then. Here are the seven rules we've got to follow as GOSPEL from now until this war is over. Not some of them—ALL of them. Not some of us—ALL OF US, farmers, businessmen, laborers, white-collar workers!

Buy only what you need. A patch on your pants is a badge of honor these days.

Keep your OWN prices DOWN. Don't ask higher prices—for your own labor, your own services, or goods you sell. Resist all pressure to force YOUR prices up!

Never pay a penny more than the ceiling price for ANYTHING. Don't buy rationed goods without giving up the right amount of coupons.

Pay your taxes willingly, no matter how stiff they get. This war's got to be paid for and *taxes are the cheapest way to do it.*

Pay off your old debts. Don't make any new ones.

Start a savings account and make regular deposits. Buy and keep up life insurance.

Buy War Bonds and hold on to them. Buy them with dimes and dollars it HURTS like blazes to do without.

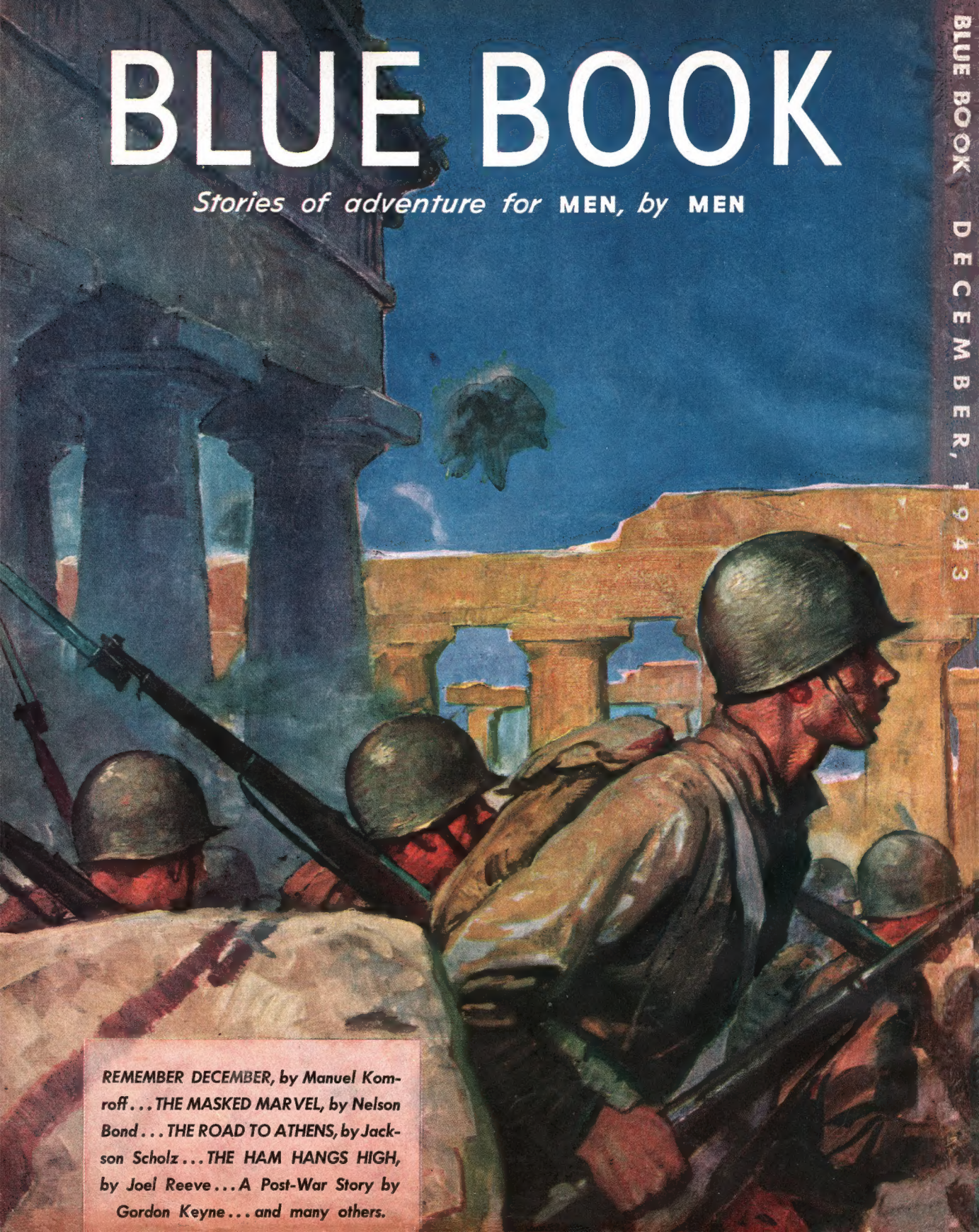
Start making these sacrifices now—keep them up for the duration—and this country of ours will be sitting pretty after the war . . . *and so will you.*

Uncle Sam

KEEP PRICES DOWN!

Use it up • Wear it out
Make it do • Or do without

BLUE BOOK

A painting depicting a scene from World War II. In the foreground, a soldier in a helmet and olive drab uniform is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He is holding a rifle. Behind him, other soldiers are visible, also in helmets. The background features the ruins of a city with classical architecture, including columns and arches. The sky is a deep blue, and there is a small, dark, cloud-like shape in the upper center. The overall style is that of a classic magazine illustration.

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN

BLUE BOOK DECEMBER, 1943

REMEMBER DECEMBER, by Manuel Komroff... THE MASKED MARVEL, by Nelson Bond... THE ROAD TO ATHENS, by Jackson Scholz... THE HAM HANGS HIGH, by Joel Reeve... A Post-War Story by Gordon Keyne... and many others.

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